

Title	Home, family and society: women of the Irish landed class, 1860-1914. A Munster case study
Authors	O'Riordan, Maeve
Publication date	2014
Original Citation	O'Riordan, M. 2014. Home, family and society: women of the Irish landed class, 1860-1914. A Munster case study. PhD Thesis, University College Cork.
Type of publication	Doctoral thesis
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Download date	2023-05-04 20:09:43
Item downloaded from	http://hdl.handle.net/10468/1557



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Home, family and society: women of the Irish landed class, c.1860-1914.

A Munster case study.

Maeve O’Riordan

**Submitted to the National University of Ireland, Cork, in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

School of History

Under the supervision of Dr Clare O’Halloran

Head of School: Prof. Geoffrey Roberts

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Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the support and assistance of a number of individuals and organisations. First and foremost I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Clare O'Halloran, who has taught me a great deal. From the first meeting to the very final draft she has been a constant mentor, guide and friend, and it has been a great support to know that her wisdom was always just an email away. The School of History at UCC, and especially the head of school, Prof. Geoff Roberts, have made me most welcome and provided me with important teaching experience, and the funding opportunities provided by the School were an important support. I would especially like to thank Charlotte, Deirdre, Geraldine and Maeve for being so helpful with every possible query. Thanks also to Andy Bielenberg for his advice on statistical analysis and fertility patterns, and Carmel Quinlan and Sandra McAvoy for valuable references. The funding of the Irish Research Council was essential to the success of the project, and is gratefully acknowledged.

Research has been carried out in various repositories in Ireland and England. I would like to thank the staff in the library and archives at UCC, especially Emer, Carol, Mary and Peadar for their warm welcome. I would also like to thank all the staff in the Manuscript Reading Room at the National Library of Ireland for their patience and assistance. A special thank you goes to Robert, Gabrielle, Albinia and Patrick Boyle for welcoming me into their home and allowing me access to their family papers. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of the staff at Cork City and County Archive, Muckross House Library, and Lissanalta House. Maria Luddy, Anthony Malcomson and Mary O'Dowd all helped me to track down papers in private hands and their generous assistance is gratefully acknowledged. On these research trips I stayed with very generous friends and family, and I would like to thank Ailish, Donnacha and Niamh, Emma, Jane, Shane, and especially Ken, Martina and Teresa for giving me a very welcome home away from home.

I would like to thank Marie for giving me a book in 2003, which helped to start the journey towards this project, and my family for encouraging my interest in history, and the history of women, from an early age. I would also like to thank the Sheraton Courters who made this PhD journey with me, especially Martin and Michael, who welcomed me into the fold, and Kara who started with me, and to Sarah-Anne and John for all the advice. Thanks to the organisers of the various conferences I have attended for the stimulating programmes. Distractions are also important, and I am indebted to friends from home, from college, from DVD night, and from Mallow, for providing some much needed distraction.

My greatest debt is reserved for my wonderful family, old and new. I am grateful to Marie and Clare for providing the perfect place to recharge the batteries, and Marie and Ted for all the Sunday dinners. I would like to thank Eamon, who though far away, has provided me with excellent ego-boosting encouragement whenever I needed it most, and even when I didn't. I am eternally grateful to the unfathomably generous support and assistance of my parents, whose unconditional encouragement has been a constant source of comfort to me. It would not be possible to quantify the debt I owe them, or the appreciation I feel. Lastly, but certainly not least, I cannot list all the reasons why I want to thank Dave, who has made a tremendous contribution to this project through being the kind, thoughtful, patient, generous and supportive person that he is. He has listened to, encouraged and inspired me in every possible way over the past four years. To all of you: Thank You.

Declaration

I declare that the thesis submitted is my own work and has not been submitted for another degree either at University College Cork or elsewhere

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Abbreviations

CDS	Clergy Daughters' School
CNG	County of Cork Needlework Guild
IRA	Irish Republican Army
MFH	Master of Fox Hounds
MWFL	Munster Women's Franchise League
NLI	National Library of Ireland
NUI	National University of Ireland
PNEU	Parents National Education Union
RHA	Royal Hibernian Academy

Introduction

The Project

‘She is perfectly happy & the more I see of Him the more I feel he will be all we wish- he is so tender with and about her, and quite sees what a delicate plant she is, & what care & repose she requires a very rare quality in a man – men generally acting as if they believed women to be made of iron!’¹

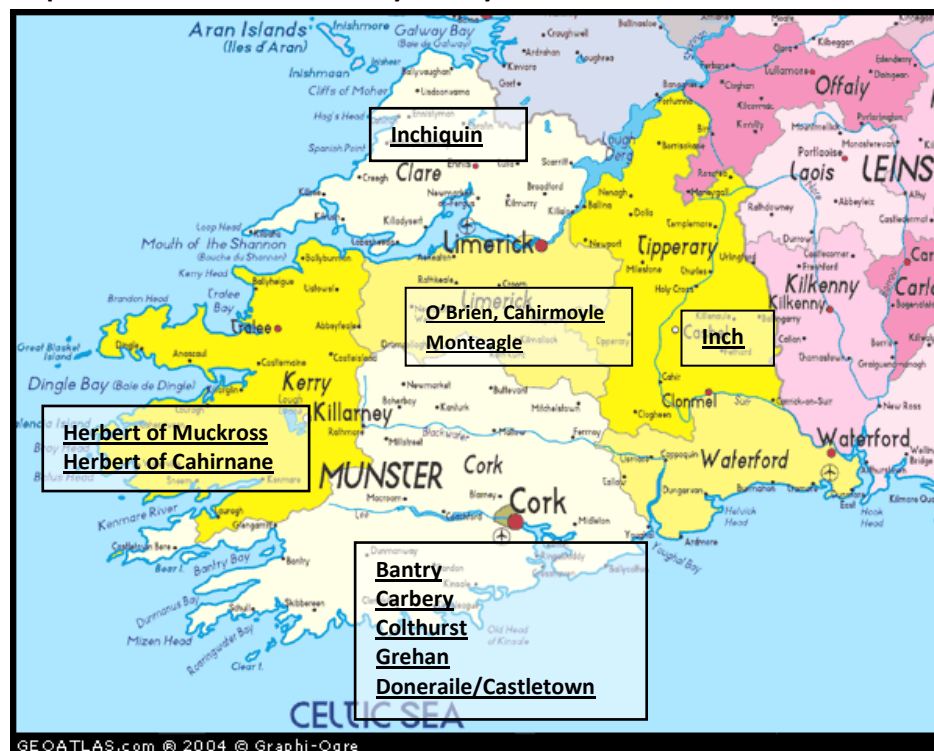
So wrote Jane White, Countess of Bantry in 1874, when she reported on the interaction between her daughter and future son-in-law. Advice literature and novels of the day, and the debate surrounding female education and suffrage, would suggest that upper-class men did not think women were ‘made of iron’.² Jane’s daughter was ‘a delicate flower’; she suffered from rheumatism from at least the age of thirteen, and possibly had tuberculosis when she died at the age of thirty-one. The countess on the other hand, was the dominant partner in her marriage, and outlived three of her children. She managed at least three houses simultaneously, and nursed her family when they were ill. She raised five children to adulthood, and took over the care of Elizabeth’s motherless children in 1878. This thesis examines the lives of women like Jane and Elizabeth. It uses personal family material to analyse women’s own views of their experiences during a time of great change for both their class and their sex. At the same time as the landed class lost its grip on wealth and power, women were being granted ever-increasing rights and freedoms. This is not an analysis of mainstream events from women’s point of view, but such events are addressed when they impact directly on these women’s lives.

¹ Jane, Countess Bantry to 3rd Earl Bantry, 12 May 1874, Bantry Estate Collection, Boole library, University College Cork [UCC], IE/BL/EP/B/2395 (original emphasis).

² Rev. John Gregg, *Women: a lecture delivered in Trinity College* (Dublin, 1856); S. Sewell, *Women and the times we live in* (Manchester, 1869); W. Landels, *Woman: her position and power* (1870); D. Barry, ‘Female suffrage from a Catholic standpoint’, *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 27 (September 1909), for some examples.

The thesis takes a sample of twelve landed families whose primary residences were in Munster (the province of south and southwest Ireland) during the period 1860-1914: the Earls of Bantry, Viscounts Doneraile, Barons Carbery, Colthurst, Inchiquin and Monteagle, the Herberts of Muckcross and Cahirnane, O'Briens of Cahirmoyle, and the Catholic Grehans of Clonmeen and Ryans of Inch. It utilises large volumes of previously un-interrogated material; letters, diaries, images, account books and legal documents to look beyond the 'separate spheres' ideology of the didactic literature of the day, and analyses the range of experience open to women who never attracted either fame or notoriety for their actions. This study will provide key contexts for the lives of individual landed women, as it analyses the world from which they came, and will allow the historian to move towards a more rounded understanding of the Irish landed class during this period of change.

Map of Munster with families by county.³



³ <http://www.ireland-map.co.uk/map-of-munster.htm> accessed on 17 Sept. 2013.

Literature Review

The first real interest in the Irish Big House was led by architectural historians, and numerous high-colour and attractive coffee-table books have gone some way towards an inventory of the more architecturally impressive houses, some of which belonged to the families in this sample.⁴ This was important preliminary work, and was tied to the efforts of the Irish Georgian Society, founded in 1958 by Desmond and Mariga Guinness, to prevent what they saw as state-sponsored ‘vandalism’, and the destruction of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century houses.⁵ The aim of the Society was ‘to encourage an interest in the preservation of distinguished examples of architecture and the allied arts in Ireland’, with a bias towards eighteenth-century buildings, but also to include gardens and demesnes.⁶ Desmond Guinness, and Desmond Fitzgerald, Knight of Glin, were both members of the Irish landed class, whose heritage they aimed to preserve. Mark Bence-Jones attempted to catalogue as many Big Houses as possible for posterity.⁷ A much more comprehensive cataloguing system, which would not have been possible without the latest technology, has been introduced by the Moore Institute in National University of Ireland, Galway. ‘The Landed Estates Database’, which lists all the Big Houses and estates in the provinces of Munster and of Connaught, and is currently focusing on the province of Ulster, is a valuable asset to the researcher.⁸ In recent years, a new value has been placed on the memory of surviving members of the Irish landed class,

⁴ ‘Bantry House’, D. Guinness, *Irish houses & castles* (London, 1971), pp. 61-70. D. FitzGerald, et.al., *Vanishing country houses of Ireland*, (Dublin, 1989), Bantry House, Doneraile Court, Dromoland Castle in J. O’Brien and D. Guinness, *Great Irish houses and castles* (London, 1992). ‘Bantry House’, D. Guinness et. al., *Great Irish houses* (Dublin, 2008), p. 68-75; D. FitzGerald and J. Peill, *The Irish country house* (London, 2010).

⁵ R. O’Byrne, *The Irish Georgian Society: a celebration* (Dublin, 2008), p. 9.

⁶ Ibid. 11., E. Malins and D. FitzGerald, *Lost demesnes: Irish landscape gardening 1660-1845* (London, 1976). Malins and P. Bowe, *Irish gardens and demesnes* (London, 1980).

⁷ Bence-Jones, *A guide to Irish country houses* (London, 1990).

⁸ Project Principal: Prof. Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, Researchers: Ms. Marie Boran & Ms. Brigid Clesham, Technical Adviser: Mr. Joe Desbonnet, ‘Landed Estates Database’, <http://landedestates.ie/> accessed on 5 Sept. 2013.

many of whom now live in Britain, and oral histories have been collected and presented using various media.⁹ Tarquin Blake has recognised a public thirst for a romanticised history of the class, and has produced two best-selling books and a website dedicated to his photographs of the crumbling remains of big houses.¹⁰

From the mid-1970s, the landed estate was also subjected to historical analysis. Prompted by the centenary of the Land War (1879-82), and the Plan of Campaign (1886-91), historians such as William E. Vaughan, James S. Donnelly Jnr and Laurence M. Geary analysed landlord-tenant relations.¹¹ Donnelly's *Land and people of nineteenth-century Cork* is an excellent study which encompasses population change, landlord-tenant relations, the management of landed estates, as well as evictions, wealth and industry. Such works have greatly advanced our understanding of the political situation in rural Ireland during this turbulent period. These studies have found that tenants did proportionately better, financially, than their landlords in the two decades after the Famine, as rents remained static and agricultural prices rose significantly.¹² These works serve to explain the increasing financial, political and social challenges which faced the landlord class during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Such research has been essential in creating a more nuanced approach to the relationship between landlord and tenant in Ireland. However, in focusing on the agrarian agitation which was rife in the last

⁹ Jane O'Hea O'Keefe, *Voices from the great houses of Cork and Kerry* (Dublin, 2013); Peter Cooney (directed), *The Raj in the Rain* (2013), feature-length, interview-based documentary made over ten years, <http://kinsaleartsfestival.com/events/the-raj-in-the-rain/> accessed on 17 Sept. 2013.

¹⁰ T. Blake, *Abandoned mansions of Ireland*, (first pub. 2010, repr. 2011, 2012); *Abandoned mansions of Ireland II, more portraits of forgotten stately homes* (Dublin, 2012); <http://www.abandonedireland.com/> accessed on 17 Sept. 2013.

¹¹ J.S. Donnelly jnr., *Landlord and tenant in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 1973) and *The land and the people of nineteenth-century Cork: the rural economy and the land question* (London, 1975); W.E. Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in Ireland, 1848-1904* (Dublin, 1984) and *Landlords and tenants in mid-Victorian Ireland* (Oxford, 1994); L. Geary, *The plan of campaign, 1886-1891* (Cork, 1986).

¹² Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants*, ix.

quarter of the nineteenth-century, and first decades of the twentieth, such works cannot devote space to the culture of the landed class. While inter-class relations were strained, and landlords were widely vilified in the press and in speeches, and indeed faced attacks on their person during this period, other aspects of landed society stubbornly continued, despite the increased financial and social threats to their way of life.

Other historians have examined the decades now perceived as the declining years of the landed class by looking inwards at the activities of the class. Such historians fall into two categories. The first includes Mark Bence-Jones, who as an insider, was able to gain access to material and memories which might not be publicly available.¹³ His *Twilight of the Ascendancy* is more useful in its demonstration of how the class perceived itself after Irish Independence had been gained in 1922 than in documenting their declining power. The more analytically valuable category of works has been written by middle-class historians who, understandably, have been better able to separate themselves from the nostalgia of the landed class. David Cannadine's *Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* is still the most authoritative work on this subject.¹⁴ This surveys the social, political and economic factors which help explain why members of the aristocracy lost the almost universal grip on power that their families had enjoyed for centuries. He has recognised that the Irish landlord faced challenges which his English cousin could only dread. While Cannadine has dealt with the public world of the landed elite, Jessica Gerard has made great progress towards a better understanding of the private lives, of men as well as women, within the estate in her *Country House life: family*

¹³ M. Bence-Jones, *Twilight of the ascendancy* (London, 1987).

¹⁴ D. Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven, 1990).

and servants, 1815-1914.¹⁵ Here, Gerard made a first step towards finding out ‘what actually went on inside the nineteenth-century country house,’ and charted the demography of landed families and their servants.¹⁶ Her study gives an acute insight into family life in the English and Welsh country house.

In the Irish context, Terence Dooley has charted the decline of the landed class in the period 1860 to 1960.¹⁷ Taking a more broadly focused approach than Cannadine, he deals more with life inside the Big House, including servants, but also devotes space to the peculiarly Irish phenomenon of house burnings, which took place during the War of Independence and the Civil War that followed. His essential work therefore has similarities with the aims of both Cannadine and Gerard, and like the latter, he includes important statistical research on marriage.¹⁸

Fergus Campbell’s *The Irish Establishment, 1879-1914*¹⁹ offers another valuable contribution to the history of the Irish landed class during this tumultuous period, though his study has a different starting point to Dooley’s; instead of analysing why the landed class declined, he asked why, and to what extent, the composition of the Irish establishment (‘individuals who by virtue of the formal position which they held...were able to influence critically important decision-making’) changed and became more Catholic and nationalist in the three decades before the First World War.²⁰ The landed elite were only one strand of the 1,200 individuals who, he believes, made up this establishment, and he draws links and makes comparisons between the landed, administrative, political, law enforcement

¹⁵ (Oxford, 1994).

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 1.

¹⁷ T. Dooley, *Decline of the Big House in Ireland: a study of Irish landed families, 1860-1960* (Dublin, 2001).

¹⁸ Gerard, *Country house life*, pp. 23-6. Dooley, *Decline*, pp. 67-8.

¹⁹ F. Campbell’s *The Irish establishment, 1879-1914* (Oxford, 2009).

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 5,7.

and religious elites.²¹ In his chapter on land, Campbell analyses the origins and the fate of 291 landowners who ‘owned more than 10,000 acres in Ireland in 1881’, and argues that ‘the decline of Irish landlordism was caused primarily by the Irish landlords’ failure to transcend its roots in colonization and dispossession.’²²

Both Dooley and Campbell address the connections between the decline of the Irish landlord and the growth of nationalist sentiment and state building. The former has contended that the reasons for the decay of the landed class as a powerhouse of Irish society was ‘outside the control of landlords’, while the latter argues that the ‘closed’ nature of the power elite contributed to the development of revolutionary sentiment in Ireland.²³ Olwen Purdue has added another facet to the understanding of the Big House and the landed class through her 2009 study *The Big House in the North of Ireland: land, power and social elites, 1878-1960*.²⁴ This filled the gap provided by Dooley’s decision to confine his study to the twenty-six counties which would become the Republic, ‘because of the different socio-economic and political conditions which existed in the six-north-eastern counties.’²⁵ Northern Irish families continued to live within the British state and held many political views in common with their tenants, but nonetheless had declined as a power-holding class by the 1960s.

In all of these works, with the exception of Gerard’s, women are almost invisible. Indeed, Dooley has admitted that ‘there is a glaring lacuna with regard to

²¹ Ibid., pp. 5.

²² Ibid., pp. 18,49.

²³ Dooley, *Decline*, p. 272; Campbell, *Irish establishment*, p. 318.

²⁴ O., Purdue, *The big house in the north of Ireland: land, power and social elites, 1878-1960* (Dublin, 2009).

²⁵ Dooley, *Decline*, p. 10.

the role of women in Irish big houses'.²⁶ Campbell confined his research to those who held formal positions of power, so while he recognised that '[t]here were many voices – many of them undoubtedly women's voices – whispering instructions into the ears of the members of the Irish establishment...this book does not pay any attention to them.'²⁷ Maria Luddy has also observed the shortfall of research on the women of this class, and in 2005 wrote; 'we have no study of landed women in nineteenth-century Ireland. Did they play any role in the management of the estates? How did they manage their households? How significant was their political role...?'²⁸ Historical research on women in Ireland has been growing in recent years, but as yet there have been no class-specific studies of women along the lines of those by Judith Schneid Lewis, Pat Jalland, M. Jeanne Peterson and Amanda Vickery.²⁹ These works have gone some way towards counterbalancing the male-centred approach of Cannadine, and have shed light on the lives of upper-class women in Britain. By using small samples, these studies have been able to detail the range of activities and responsibilities which shaped the lives of such women. In *Aristocratic women and political society in Victorian Britain*, K.D. Reynolds has successfully countered the wisdom of Cannadine's decision to exclude women from his focus by detailing the power and influence exercised by women in the political arena, not as 'adjuncts to men', but as important actors in their own right.³⁰ Reynolds and Peterson have both shown greater understanding than Cannadine or Dooley of the nature of male and female roles within the family before the First World War. Both

²⁶ Dooley, *The big houses and landed estates of Ireland, a research guide* (Dublin, 2007), p. 178.

²⁷ Campbell, *Irish establishment*, p. 6.

²⁸ M. Luddy, 'Women's History', in Laurence M. Geary and Margaret Kelleher (eds), *Nineteenth-century Ireland: a guide to recent research* (Dublin, 2005), p. 59.

²⁹ J. Schneid Lewis, *In the family way: childbearing in the British Aristocracy, 1760-1860* (New Brunswick, 1986); M.J. Peterson, *Family, love and work in the lives of Victorian gentlewomen* (Indiana, 1989); A. Vickery, *The gentleman's daughter: women's lives in Georgian England* (New Haven, 1998).

³⁰ Reynolds, *Aristocratic women* (Oxford, 1998).

husband and wife worked together to further the success of the family, as a man's career was not his alone; whether he was a landlord, politician or clergyman, his work reflected on his family, as much as it did on himself as an individual.

Early efforts to research the history of women in Ireland were pre-occupied with the 'Great Women' approach, which focuses on exceptional women, and with the revolutionary period, this has done little to develop research into the everyday life of women, of any class.³¹ The influence of Amanda Vickery's seminal article, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', written twenty years ago, has yet to be widely seen in Irish women's history. In that article, Vickery critiqued the way in which historians of the nineteenth century have been taken in by 'didactic literature, contemporary feminist debate and post-Victorian denunciations,' which can lead to an over-acceptance of the 'separate spheres' ideology. This 'fails to capture the texture of female subordination and the complex interplay of emotion and power in family life'.³² Without a study that documents the experiences of a sample of women in all aspects of their lives, it is not possible to provide 'a nuanced account of women's everyday lives and informal powers'.³³

Research that has been carried out specifically on the women of the landed class has taken the form of biographical studies. Daughters of landlords such as Constance Markievicz, Lady Gregory and Edith Somerville have been obvious subjects for biographies, because of the achievements they made during their

³¹ M. Ward, *Unmanageable revolutionaries: women and Irish nationalism* (London, 1995); M. Broderick, *Wild Irish women: extraordinary lives from history* (Dublin, 2001; repr. 2002, 2012) for just two examples.

³² A. Vickery, 'Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women's history', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 36, no. 2 (Jun., 1993), pp. 383-414:401.

³³ Vickery, 'Separate spheres', p. 401.

lifetimes.³⁴ However, biographical studies can stress the remarkable nature of the subject, and serve to differentiate them from their family and class surroundings. Markievicz renounced her social background, but there has been no historical study of the women of this class, which would help determine exactly what it was that she renounced. Still, biographical studies have made important contributions, and Diane Urquhart's triple biography of three successive Ladies Londonderry has enriched our understanding of the role of the most elite women in politics, before they were entitled to any official positions.³⁵

Despite the valuable contributions of the above authors to the historiography of women and of the landed class, the position of landed women in Ireland during this period is far less well understood than it was for the early nineteenth-century. Anthony Malcomson, and secondly Deborah Wilson have analysed marriage patterns and dynamics within the class.³⁶ Wilson's painstakingly researched book would be of interest to anyone seeking a better understanding of the implications of marriage and property law, but with such dry legal sources, it was difficult for the personalities of the women studied to shine through. In the case of this thesis, the aim is to make a significant contribution to knowledge that is firmly grounded in the research of personal private material, and can therefore shed light on the female experience, as well as the wider class.

³⁴ Twenty-nine search results are returned under Countess Markievicz, forty-six under Lady Gregory, and twenty under Edith Somerville on the Irish History Online database, which catalogues publications on Irish history since 1938. <http://iho.ie/index.php> accessed on 21 Sept. 2013.

³⁵ D. Urquhart, *The Ladies of Londonderry: politics, patronage and power* (London, 2007).

³⁶ A.P. W. Malcomson, *The pursuit of the heiress: aristocratic marriage in Ireland, 1740-1840* (Belfast, 1982); D. Wilson, *Women, marriage and property in wealthy landed families in Ireland, 1750-1850* (Manchester, 2009).

Timeline of study

The time period of the study was chosen to reflect the changing fortunes of the landed class, and of the rights of women. The 1860s was a decade of stability and prosperity for the landed class in Ireland, and this continued until the bad harvests at the end of the 1870s. The 1880s has been perceived as the decade when their fortunes began to irretrievably decline. Pressure increased during the years of the study and by 1918, 64% of tenanted land had been purchased.³⁷ Boycotting, intimidation and withholding of rents were tactics used by the tenant farming class to wrest control of the land from their landlords. Tenants who had once greeted their landlords with deference now openly abused them.³⁸ The Land League campaigned for rents to be reduced in line with the state-sponsored Griffith's valuation, even though this was now out-of-date, and below the real value of the land. Those who charged rents above this rate were vilified as rack-renters.³⁹ Many landlords engaged with their tenants, and reduced rents or offered abatements to reflect the economic downturn and poor weather conditions of the late 1870s and 1880s, but others ruthlessly demanded the full rent, sometimes from desperation at their own near-insolvency.⁴⁰ Except for one or two cases,⁴¹ the landed class failed to unite to support each other against claims for lower rents, or boycotting, and many were

³⁷ F. Campbell, *Land and revolution: nationalist politics in the west of Ireland, 1891-21* (Oxford, 2005), p. 91.

³⁸ L. Geary, 'Anticipating memory: landlordism, agrarianism, and deference in late-nineteenth century Ireland', in T. Dunne and L. Geary (eds), *History and the public sphere: essays in honour of John A. Murphy* (Cork, 2005).

³⁹ Dooley, *Decline*, 91.

⁴⁰ Geary, L. 'The Land War on the Kingston Estate 1879-1888', unpublished Masters Thesis, University College Cork, 1979. L.P. Curtis jnr., 'Landlord responses to the Irish Land War, 1879-87', *Eire-Ireland*, vol. 38, no. 3-4, 2003.

⁴¹ Geary, *Plan of Campaign*, pp. 101-3, 139.

forced to make concessions.⁴² The government came to believe that the only solution to the agrarian unrest was ‘to transfer the land from the landlords to the tenants.’⁴³

Landlords felt abandoned and betrayed by the political establishment in Britain, who had vilified them as ‘stupid ... criminal ... injudicious.’⁴⁴ It was not until the 1903 Wyndham Act that landlords were offered a financially viable get-out clause, with the entire price of the land plus a bonus paid up front, and there was a back-log of landlords wishing to sell all or part of their estates.⁴⁵ Many believed that by selling their lands, and investing the capital, they could preserve their way of life, and their position in society.⁴⁶ Cannadine has gone so far as to state that ‘by 1914, the system of great estates had effectively disappeared in Ireland.’⁴⁷ This is an exaggeration. The landed class had been hit politically and financially, but they were not defeated, and generally still retained their houses. On the eve of war the landed class still enjoyed ‘collective self-confidence and ... serene faith in their ultimate invulnerability.’ This was ‘shattered’ by the end of the War, and one in five of those who served were killed, compared to one in eight of the general population.⁴⁸ By terminating the study in 1914, it was possible to examine the class as they were before the War, rather than bringing in later challenges, such as the War of Independence, Civil War, a more hostile Dáil, and the Great Depression. This is a study of the class during what we can, with hindsight, see as their ‘Twilight’ years. It was only from the 1920s that families began to sell their houses and abandon the

⁴² Ibid., 109.

⁴³ *Times*, n.d. Dec. 1885, quoted in Cannadine, *Decline and fall*, p. 65.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 65.

⁴⁵ Dooley, *Decline*, pp. 113-5.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 118-9.

⁴⁷ Cannadine, *Decline and fall*, pp. 70-71.

⁴⁸ Cannadine, *Decline and fall*, pp. 84, 83.

country.⁴⁹ As will be shown, they were still imbued with a strong sense that they occupied their rightful place in society.

Meanwhile, the 1860s saw the introduction of the first bill for women's suffrage in 1867, and it was the decade when the Haslams and Isabella Tod, the first generation of campaigners for female suffrage and education in Ireland, began their public work, and the first petition for female suffrage was sent to the House of Commons.⁵⁰ By extending back that far, it was possible to examine how two, and in some cases three, generations of women viewed their place in society, as that society began reluctantly to acquiesce to women's demands for greater autonomy.

Significant developments took place in the lives of women during the period 1860-1914. These included increased access to education, and tolerance of women in some of the professions. Women won the local franchise, and were within sight of the vote (for those over thirty on the same terms as men) by the eve of the First World War. Married women also gained increased rights with the Married Women's Property Acts (1870, 1882), and the Divorce Act (1857).⁵¹ These changes were hard won, and women in Ireland were involved in agitation for suffrage, for and against Home Rule and Independence. Organisations and committees were set up to mobilise women to the various causes,⁵² and in 1908, *Bean na hEireann*, a purely female nationalist mouthpiece, first went to print, to be followed by the women's suffrage organ, the *Irish Citizen*, in 1912. Militant suffrage agitators, nicknamed suffragettes, were heckled and attacked in the streets for their barely legal, and

⁴⁹ Dooley, *Decline*, pp. 257, 276.

⁵⁰ Anon., *Report of the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association*, (Dublin, 1918).

⁵¹ L. Holcombe, *Wives and property: reform of the married women's property law in nineteenth-century England* (Oxford, 1983); L. Stone, *The road to divorce: England 1530-1987* (Oxford, 1990).

⁵² These included: Irish Women's Suffrage Society, 1873; Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association (1876); Irish Women's Franchise League (1908), Unionist Women's Franchise League (1909).

illegal, activity. Some of the leading members of the Irish intelligentsia were women, as debates raged over education, suffrage and nationalism.⁵³ Landed women were not noted for taking leadership positions in any of these movements, and like their husbands, were often conservative in their political views.

There were many developments in women's dress, and the fashionable silhouette went through dramatic changes from the expansive crinolines of the 1860s, which prevented women from walking together on narrow paths, to the hobble skirted, forward-leaning, top-heavy, silhouette of the turn of the century, and on to the more youthful, athletic, and healthy, ideal in vogue on the eve of war.⁵⁴ This change of silhouette marked an acceptance that women should be able to move freely, and that restrictive clothing was unhealthy. This mirrored the acceptance of the involvement of women in a wide array of sporting activities.

Female suffrage was not achieved by 1914, but it was very close. From a women's history point of view, it was also important to finish the study in 1914, as the increased opportunities available to women during the war were not a reflection of the prospects open to them during peace time. The project's value is increased as its date range is co-terminous with, or encompassed by, such important works as Campbell's *The Irish Establishment: 1879-1914*, Dooley's *The Decline of the Big House in Ireland: 1860-1960*, Gerard's *Country House Life: Family and Servants, 1815-1914* and Jalland's *Women, Marriage and Politics 1860-1914*.

⁵³ For example, Anna Haslam, Isabella Todd, Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington.

⁵⁴ E. Ewing, *History of 20th century fashion*, (1974, revised and updated by A. Mackrell, fourth edition 2001, repr. 2005), pp. 1-79; V. Steele, *The corset: a cultural history* (Yale 2001, repr. 2004), p. 84, 109.

Sample

There are similarities and differences to be seen among the families in this sample. In 1860, the land in Ireland was almost exclusively owned by the 6,500 landlords who lived comfortably on the income gained from renting their lands to tenants.⁵⁵ The landed elite was a small class. Generally, in historical research, the minimum property requirement for a landlord has been set at 500 acres of land, or an estate worth over £500.⁵⁶ However, above this cut-off point there was huge variation in wealth, and such studies have found it necessary, in the words of Cannadine, to differentiate between the ‘marginal landowner eking out his existence on £1,000 a year’, and ‘the Duke of Westminster, jogging along on his income of nearly £1,000 a day.’⁵⁷ K.T. Hoppen has divided Irish landlords into five different wealth categories, from the 2,638 who owned between 500 and 1000 acres, up to the magnates with estates exceeding 10,000 acres.⁵⁸ Dooley has been content to divide the class in four; the lowest category being estates under 5,000 acres, and the highest exceeding 20,000.⁵⁹ Cannadine’s highest wealth cohort were the 250 magnates whose estates exceeded 30,000 acres.⁶⁰ Landed families in Ireland were also divided by origin, and by religion. In 1861, 48 per cent of landlords were Episcopalians, and 43 per cent Catholic.⁶¹ Catholic landowners were generally bunched at the lower end of the scale, and only made up 7 per cent of Campbell’s sample of magnates.⁶² Some landowners such as the Barons Inchiquin, whose 20,321 acre Co. Clare estate was valued at £11,681, were of old Gaelic stock, but the majority were descendants from

⁵⁵ Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in mid-Victorian Ireland*, p. 6.

⁵⁶ U.H. Hussey de Burgh, *The landowners of Ireland. An alphabetical list of the owners of estates of £500 acres or £500 valuation and upwards in Ireland and the acreage valuation of each county* (Dublin, 1878), also Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants*, p. 6.

⁵⁷ Cannadine, *Decline and fall*, p. 22.

⁵⁸ Hoppen, *Elections*, 107. Table 25.

⁵⁹ Dooley, *Decline*, pp. 11-12.

⁶⁰ Cannadine, *Decline and Fall*, p. 10.

⁶¹ Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants*, p. 11.

⁶² Campbell, *The Irish Establishment*, p. 17.

planters who arrived during the early modern period. The newest cohort of landlords, like the Catholic Grehan family, had made their fortune in trade, and joined the ranks of the landlord class in the years after the Famine by buying land through the Encumbered Estates Court.⁶³ From this study, it would appear that such families were fully assimilated into the existing class, and the social network of the Grehan family was comprised of members of Catholic and Protestant elites. Sons of the Catholic Ryan and Grehan families joined the British army, and they were equally as conservative and Unionist in their outlook as their Protestant neighbours; the only distinction being that it was frowned upon for Protestants and Catholics to intermarry. Despite variations in wealth, religion, and origin, the class were closely bound by culture, politics, and a shared sense that they deserved their privileged position in society.⁶⁴

Ireland is not as well endowed as its nearest neighbour in terms of surviving family papers. Many have been destroyed, or only partially preserved. Still, it was not possible, within the remit of this project, to analyse all the surviving papers of landed women created during the period under review. Some selection process was required. It was impossible to randomly selected families on which to base this study, as women are often under-represented in the surviving estate collections.⁶⁵ Married women have been better represented in the surviving material; probably because the next generation would be more likely to keep their mothers' papers than those of their aunts. Little or no material has survived on some women in these sample families.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 21.

⁶⁴ Cannadine, pp. 23-4.

⁶⁵ For example, estate collections such as Bessborough Papers, NLI Collection List no. 25, contains only accounting material.

Munster presented itself as the ideal locus of this case study, as it seemed to best represent the range of landlords and estates in the country as a whole. Donnelly has convincingly argued that Cork, the largest county in Munster and indeed the entire island, can be ‘regarded as a microcosm of the whole country,’ as people and land were poorer in the west, and holdings were larger in the east of the county.⁶⁶ However, it was not possible to limit the study to one county, as none would have had enough surviving material generated by landed women. By extending the study to the entire province, a manageable sample could be analysed, and still it was possible to avoid the pitfall of the ‘Great Women’ approach, of choosing women because of specific achievements.

As this is a study of female experience, however, it was not possible to tie the study strictly to any one geographical area. While the paternal line of these families might remain in the same location, even the same house, for centuries, women rarely lived out their old age in the house where they were born. They moved to their husband’s home when they married, and if they did not marry, they often vacated their childhood home to make space for their brother’s new family. Therefore, only a minority of these women could be deemed Munster women, in the strictest sense of the word. Many were born in England, or other parts of Ireland, before marrying into the Munster elite. Others grew up in Ireland, but moved away in adult life. Therefore, within these collections of family papers there are some written by female relatives in England, or elsewhere in Ireland. For example, Lucius, the 15th Baron Inchiquin married Ethel Foster, an heiress from Shropshire. As she inherited her birth family’s estate, she took personal material to her Co. Clare home of Dromoland. For this reason, we are able to read her paternal Yorkshire-based

⁶⁶ Donnelly, *The land and people of nineteenth century Cork*, p. 2.

grandfather's opinions on girl children, and her mother's on the merits of married life, both written during the 1860s.⁶⁷ This material has been incorporated into the study, as such relations were part of the fabric of these women's lives. Even more, perhaps, than was suggested by Cannadine, these women were a 'supra-national elite'. It would be worth analysing these inter-connections across the Irish Sea in greater detail, in a later project.

The sample discussed here represents small, middling and large landowning families, and can be found in John Bateman's *The Great Landowners of Britain and Ireland* (1870), which lists 2,500 individuals who owned Irish estates valued over £1000. The acreage and valuation of these estates, as measured by Bateman can be seen in Table I. The Earl of Bantry was recorded as owning 69,500 acres of land in 1871, but, as was often the case in the west and south-west of Ireland, not all of this was profitable, and his gross annual income was estimated at £14,561. Viscount Doneraile, in contrast, owned 28,700 acres of fertile north Cork and Waterford land valued at £15,000 per annum. Two of the houses in this sample were sold during the period under review. Muckross House was put up for sale in 1899, as the Herberts were heavily in debt. It was bought, for sentimental reasons, by Lord Ardilaun, at the instigation of his wife, whose mother, Jane, Countess of Bantry, had been born into the Muckross estate.⁶⁸ Down the road at Cahirnane, a junior branch of the Herbert family was also forced to sell out, as they could not service the debts incurred from building a new house on the estate. Other families carried on despite the challenges, and strove to maintain their position in society. Lord and Lady Castletown had continuing financial troubles and leased both Doneraile Court, and their London house at different times. They were reduced to bringing their silver, linen and other

⁶⁷ Letters (for e.g.) NLI/MS/45,519, Journal, 1864-75, NLI/MS/14858.

⁶⁸ 'Bantry', *Burke's Peerage*.

necessary items from house to house, as they could no longer afford multiple sets.⁶⁹

In the midst of many challenges, however, they all remained generally optimistic, and some Big House building, and alterations, continued up to the last years of the study.

⁶⁹ Copy of letter, Edward, 6th Viscount Doneraile to Tayler, June 1931, NLI/MS/34,161, See also Canon Sheehan to Oliver Wendell Holmes, 25 Mar. 1911, quoted in G.E. White, *Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes: law and the inner self* (Oxford, 1993), p. 244.

Table I: Family estate valuations.⁷⁰

Family	House	Built	County	Acreage	Bateman's valuation
Bantry	Bantry House, Macroon Castle	18th century	Cork	69,500	£14,561
Carbery	Castlefreke (Laxton Hall, Wansford, Northamptonshire)	Renovated 1910	Cork	13,692	£6,179
			Queen's Co.	2,919	£1,344
			Limerick	2,724	£2,992
			Northampton	1,667	£1,985
			Dorset	244	£350
			Total	21,246	£12,850
Colthurst	Blarney Castle	1874	Cork	31,260	£9,664
Doneraile	Doneraile Court	18th century	Cork	16,400	£8,500
			Waterford	12,300	£6,500
			Total	28,700	£15,000
Grehan	Clonmeen House	1893	Cork	2,319	2,716
Herbert Cahirname	Cahirname House	1870s	[Kerry]	[3,016]	[1,995]
Herbert Muckross	Muckross House	1839-43	Kerry	47,238	10,547
Inchiquin	Dromoland	1830s	Clare	20,321	£11,681
Monteagle	Mount Trenchard	18 th century	Limerick	6,445	£5,046
			Kerry	2,310	£1,109
			Total	8,755	£6,137
O' Brien	Cahirmoyle	1870s	Limerick	4,997	£5,316
Ryan	Inch	18 th century	Tipperary	[1,694]	[1,568]
Castletown (Lady Castletown, heiress of Viscount Doneraile married the heir)	Granston Manor		Queen's Co. And Sussex	23,143	£15,758

⁷⁰ J. Bateman, *The great landowners of Great Britain and Ireland* (first pub. 1876, repr., Leicester 1971), pp. 25, 76, 81, 193, 218, 236, 315, 340; U.H. Hussey de Burgh, *The landowners of Ireland: an alphabetical list of the owners of estates of 500 acres or £500 valuation or upwards, in Ireland, with the acreage in each county* (Dublin, 1878), Bantry p. 19; Carbery p. 70, recorded Carbery Irish acreage as: Cork, 13,692, Kilkenny 524, Limerick, 2724, Queen's Co., 2919 with total valuation of £10,755; Colthurst, p. 92; Doneraile, p. 132, Doneraile lands in Cork down to acreage of 8,374, and Waterford 6,584, with a total valuation of 13,738; p. 193, Grehan: Cork 7316 acres valued at £2,726; Herberts p. 215; Inchiquin, p. 230; Monteagle, p. 321; O'Brien of Cahirmoyle acreage of 4,990 valued at £3630, Ryan, p. 399; Castletown, 22,241 acres valued at £14,151. For more house details see: Bantry; <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/property-show.jsp?id=3768>; Blarney; <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/property-show.jsp?id=3190>; Castlefreke, <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/property-show.jsp?id=2896>; Clonmeen, <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/property-show.jsp?id=3559>; Doneraile Court, <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/property-show.jsp?id=3034>; Dromoland, <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/property-show.jsp?id=1993>; Clonmeen, <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/property-show.jsp?id=3559>; Inch; <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/property-show.jsp?id=4247> Mount Trenchard, <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/property-show.jsp?id=2274>; Cahirmoyle; <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/property-show.jsp?id=2187>.

Many of the families in this sample were inter-linked, owing to strategic marriage alliances. The Catholic families of Grehan and Ryan were linked through marriage in successive generations.⁷¹ The Barons Inchiquin were related to the O'Briens of Cahirmoyle, the Bantrys and the Herberts of Muckcross. There was a further connection from the Bantrys to the O'Briens of Cahirmoyle, the Monteagles and the Herberts of Cahirnane. It is only by closely examining family material that it is possible to trace such links, and to understand the truly interconnected nature of the top 2,500 landed families in Ireland.

Sources

It was essential to use personal material for this study, in order to access these women's own voices. Micro-historical methods allow an understanding of the pattern of these women's lives and of their roles and status, and facilitate a detailed analysis of their personal written material, from which also emerges their self-perceptions and the attitudes of others to them. '[M]icrohistorical investigations often take as the object of their analyses the themes of the private, the personal, and the lived experience, the same themes forcefully proposed by the women's movement.'⁷² Judith Schneid Lewis' study is successful, because her sample was limited to the experiences of fifty aristocratic women.⁷³ By looking closely at those women's correspondence, for example, Schneid Lewis was able to conclude that the rate of stillbirths was higher than has been assumed from official figures.⁷⁴

Large gaps present themselves in the biographical information provided on the women of the family in all available sources. A search of the matrilineal line is

⁷¹ 'Grehan', *Burke's landed gentry*.

⁷² Ginzburg, C., and C.Poni, 'the name and the game: unequal exchange and the historiographic marketplace', in E. Muir and G. Ruggerio (eds), *Microhistory and the lost peoples of Europe* (London, 1991), p. 4.

⁷³ Schneid-Lewis, *Family way*, p. 4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

especially frustrating, and demands constant cross-referencing between a number of sources, and within those sources. An example of the difficulties faced by the researcher can be found in the Baron Monteagle entry of *Burke's Peerage and Baronetage*.⁷⁵ The date of birth is provided for the sons, but not for the daughters of the family, and for three daughters there is no information provided whatsoever, excluding their names. It is therefore unknown whether they lived past childhood, married, or had children of their own. It is recorded that Mary, the second daughter, married Edward O'Brien, 'a nephew of Lord Inchiquin', but it is necessary to search for Edward O'Brien to learn if they had any children. In contrast, for youngest brother, Frank, who would not inherit the estate, the reader is provided with his date of birth, details of his career, and marriage, and the names and dates of his two children. Such information gaps are typical, and glaring voids mean that any statistical study which relies on the biographical data of landed women will have a large percentage of unknown values. Census returns can provide some supplementary material. However, they are of little worth for analysing those women who died during the nineteenth century, as census data before 1901 was destroyed by fire. The 1901 and 1911 census are of some use in relation to the age, and number, of children born to the wives of Munster landlords. However, this study is predominately focused on personal, rather than statistical material, which has made it possible to examine the experiences of married, unmarried and widowed women in the sample.

Most of the material studied here has not previously been analysed by historians. Two of the houses, Castlefreke, home of the Barons Carbery, and Doneraile Court, property of the Viscounts Doneraile, were also used in Dooley's sample of landed

⁷⁵ 'Monteagle', *Burke's Peerage and Baronetage*, 1904, p. 1067.

estates. However, neither played a central role in his work, and I have used material un-explored in his study.⁷⁶ Some of the estate papers I have analysed have only been catalogued in the past decade, and so this is one of the first PhD theses to be in a position to utilise them.⁷⁷ In total I have analysed thousands of pages of material; letters, diaries, account books, receipts, photo albums, scrapbooks, and treasured memorabilia. The majority of the material is housed in public repositories. The Bantry, Grehan and Ryan papers are held in the Boole Library in University College Cork, the Colthurst Papers are held in the Cork City and County Archive, while the Castletown, Doneraile, Inchiquin and O'Brien of Cahirmoyle Collections are to be found in the National Library of Ireland. The surviving Muckcross and Monteagle papers are in local libraries.⁷⁸ I have also analysed papers in the private ownership of Robert Boyle, of Bisbrooke Hall, Rutland; these papers complete the suite of surviving material generated by the intermarried Doneraile and Castletown families. To my knowledge, I am the first historian to have fully analysed the personal papers which form the basis of this study, although for reasons of time and space, certain women have been highlighted.⁷⁹ By analysing such under-appreciated sources, this thesis sheds light on new aspects of Big House life, while demonstrating the value of this material for other projects.

The main thrust of the research for this thesis was consciously focused on private written material generated by the women of the sample. The value of letters

⁷⁶ J. Sandford, (ed.), *Mary Carbery's West Cork journal, 1898-1901, or, 'From the back of beyond'* (Dublin, 1998); papers in private ownership, Bisbrooke Hall, Rutland.

⁷⁷ Colthurst (2009), Inchiquin (2009).

⁷⁸ Muckcross Research Library, and Lissanalta House.

⁷⁹ The only exceptions being, Drucker, N., 'Hunting & shooting-leisure, social networking and social complications, microhistorical perspectives on colonial structures and individual practices-the Grehan family, Clonmeen house, Ireland' in McDonough, T., *Was Ireland a colony? Economy, politics, ideology and culture in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 2005) analysed material from Grehan Collection and Bence-Jones, M., *Twilight of the Ascendancy* (London, 1987) had access to the scrapbook of Lady Castletown.

as historical sources has been supported by both historians and social scientists.⁸⁰

Diaries are recognised as ‘spontaneous and unvarnished’, but also as revealing ‘calculated stratagems and unconscious assumptions’.⁸¹ They allow the researcher to understand people’s perceptions of their world. As with Amanda Vickery’s *Gentleman’s Daughter*, some women in the sample are more to the fore in the coming chapters. For example, Edith, Lady Colthurst only comes under the spotlight in Chapter Two, as just a small amount of her papers survive in the Colthurst Collection. On the other hand, Esther Grehan, Mary O’Brien, the Bantry family, and Ellen and Ethel Inchiquin are central to the study, as large swathes of their correspondence are extant.

Some published material authored by women in this sample is also available; Charlotte Grace O’Brien, Katherine Everett, and Lady Carbery all published some form of biographical work during their own lifetime. This has been integrated into the research. Care had to be taken with the use of Katherine Everett’s memoir, as it was written when she was in her seventies, recalling the events of forty and fifty years earlier. At least one factual error has been found in it, and there are other examples of where her memory of events clashed with other sources.⁸² The childhood memoir of Lady Carbery cannot be taken at face value either, as she edited it in old age, and it cannot be determined how much is the voice of the child, and how much the adult creating a vision of her own childhood.⁸³

⁸⁰ R. Earle, *Epistolary selves: letters and letter-writers, 1600-1945* (Aldershot, 1999).

A. Alaszewski, *Using diaries for social research* (London, 2006).

⁸¹ J. Tosh with S. Lang, *The pursuit of history*, Fourth edition (Harlow, 2006), p. 76.

⁸² Everett, *Bricks and flowers*, p. 43, implied Ina’s parents were dead, but her mother lived until 1898.

⁸³ Mary Carbery, *Happy world: a story of a Victorian childhood* (London, 1941).

Limitations of study

While the sample size is small, the focus is broad, in order to explore as many facets of the women's lives as possible. To keep the project within feasible bounds, however, some themes could not be addressed. This thesis does not deal with the religious or spiritual life of these women, nor does it focus on their opinions of death and dying. The primary focus of the study is on adult women, and childhood is only examined in a small way. The study does not make the political or cultural movements of the day a primary context. Therefore, connections with the Celtic Revival and the Home Rule or Unionist movements, while not ignored, are not rigorously followed, if only to keep within the chronological boundaries of the study. One of the primary aims is to fill the 'glaring lacuna' regarding the history of women of the landed class during this period. There is, therefore, no space to focus in detail on the financial situation of the families, or on their fluctuating income from rentals. These topics have been analysed to some degree in the existing literature, and it is for future projects and case studies of individual estates to offer such a comprehensive analysis of estate life. As the sample is necessarily small, the statistical analysis which has been carried out on marriage and fertility patterns should be verified by a larger sample, but the more restrictive canvas has allowed a measure of colour, which statistics can never achieve. This was especially important, as it is known that fertility declined dramatically during the period in question, but little is understood of this class's attitude to children and parenting.

There is potential for great confusion when dealing with an historical sample of married women, especially titled women. All women changed their name on marriage, and some gained an extra title when their husband inherited. For example, Ethel Foster became the Hon. Mrs O'Brien when she married in 1896. In 1900, she

became known as Lady Inchiquin, when her husband inherited Dromoland, and was the Dowager Lady Inchiquin from 1929, when her husband died.⁸⁴ To avoid confusion, I refer to women by their married name throughout. For this reason, in Chapter Three, I refer to Mary Spring-Rice as Mary O'Brien, when discussing her courtship to Edward O'Brien. Two women, Ellen and Ethel, were both Ladies Inchiquin, so I refer to them by their first name, and their title throughout. Appendix One (pp.247-254) is a further aid to the reader, and short biographies are provided for men and women who are referred to repeatedly in the thesis. Also it should be noted that the term 'landed women' is used throughout in a general sense, meaning membership of the landed class, rather than implying that such women owned land themselves, which in most cases they did not.

Outline

The thesis is divided into four chapters; 'Home and Duty', 'World and Leisure', 'Marriage and Love' and 'Childbirth and Motherhood.' This structure was decided upon after some research, as themes were arrived at inductively; emerging from the data rather than imposed. Here I am following the influential model of Amanda Vickery, who analysed the written material of a sample (selected by location) of gentry and professional-class English women for an earlier period. Vickery 'consciously uses the categories which emerge in women's own writings. Thus, female experience is carved up by the multiple roles they played'.⁸⁵ Accordingly, the thesis has a thematic structure and is rooted in analysis of women's own archival material. This structure permitted the subjects most discussed in the surviving material to be subjected to historical analysis.

⁸⁴ 'Inchiquin', *Burke's peerage*, 1949.

⁸⁵ A. Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 11.

Chapter One is concerned with these women's relationships to their homes, whether they were married or single. It analyses the roles and duties placed on women within these houses. The chapter finds that women had a strong sense of responsibility towards the landed estate and their family. It demonstrates the inter-connected nature of male and female duties on the property, and unveils marriage relationships which were far more equal than the legislation at the time would suggest.

Chapter Two finds that these women were endowed with the self-confidence of their class. This allowed them to live physically active lives, and to travel widely. This sense of privilege meant that these women were less involved in the campaign for increased legal rights for women, and indeed some were hostile to female suffrage. However, despite their interest in sport and culture, they were still tied by their sense of duty to the family and estate, and this always came before their own individualistic pursuit of entertainment or fulfilment.

It was the duty of every member of the landed class, male and female, to marry well. Marriage and love form the basis for Chapter Three. Women were not forced into arranged marriages against their will by parents who desired an important political or social connection. Daughters and parents both shared the same aspirations when it came to marriage, and while emotional attachment was important, it was not enough without economic compatibility. These wives would never earn their own living, so a carefully arranged marriage settlement was essential. Despite this emphasis on economic principles, marriages were generally loving and companionate, and parents permitted their children to get to know prospective partners, to ensure that they would have a happy married life with a well-suited partner. The chapter also challenges the notion that women during this

period were asexual or sexually submissive, with the example of Lady Castletown who played off her extra-marital lovers against each other, while retaining positive relations with her husband.

The landed class could not survive without heirs, and only a married woman could provide legitimate heirs. Chapter Four examines these women's experiences of, and attitudes towards, childbirth and motherhood. While giving birth was still a dangerous activity, even for the most elite members of society, motherhood was almost universally fulfilling. In opposition to the stereotypical cold and distant aristocratic mother, these women breastfed their children, and delighted in watching them grow. They organised their children's education, and trained them for their future roles as adult members of the class. While taking these duties seriously, however, mothers did not allow motherhood to impinge on the more pressing role of wife, discussed in Chapter One, and at all times the reputation of the family, estate, and the wider class was upheld by its female members through their duties of household management, hosting, and social networking.

Taken together, these chapters analyse what these women deemed most important in their lives; their home, their family, and their society, and in doing so lead to a more rounded understanding of the class.

Clare



Fig. 1: Dromoland Castle, 1912, marital home of Ellen and Ethel, Ladies Inchiquin, Inchiquin Papers, NLI/MS/45,739 (4).

Cork



Fig. 2: Bantry House; primary seat of the Earl of Bantry. Source: Landed Estates Database, <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/property-show.jsp?id=3768> accessed on 10 Sept. 2013.



Fig. 3: Blarney House, home of the Barons Colthurst. Source: Landed Estates Database, <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/image-show.jsp?id=2758> accessed on 10 Sept. 2013.

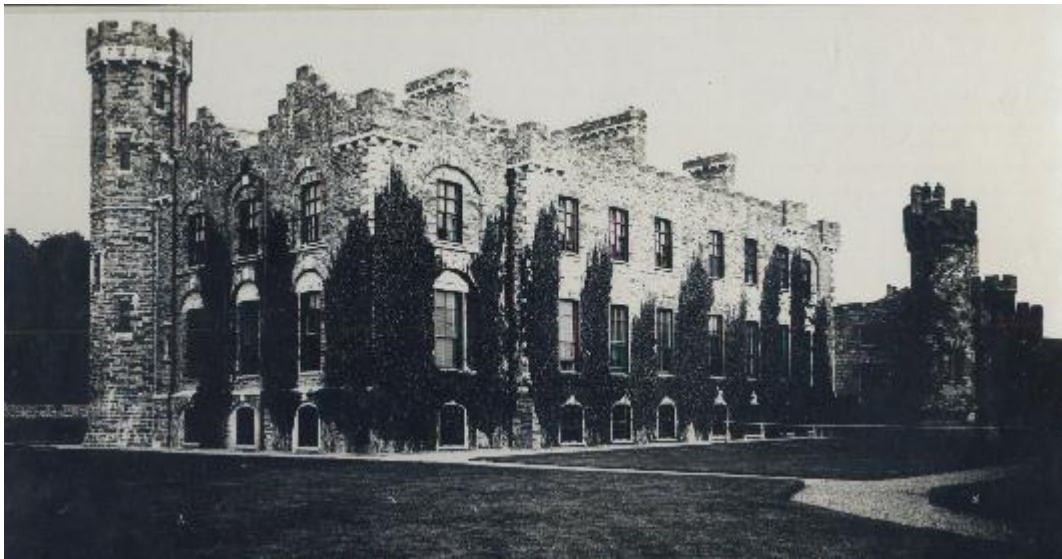


Fig. 4: Castlefreke; marital home of Mary, Lady Carbery. Source: Landed Estates Database, <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/property-show.jsp?id=2896> accessed on 10 Sept. 2013.



Fig. 5: Clonmeen House, marital home of Esther Grehan.

Source: MyHome Ltd. <http://www.myhome.ie/residential/brochure/clonmeen-house-mallow-cork/2447681> accessed on 10 Sept. 2013.



Fig. 6: Doneraile Court, marital home of Viscountess Doneraile, and inherited by Lady Castletown. Source: <http://homepage.eircom.net/~neillod/tomos.html> accessed on 14 September 2013.

Kerry



Fig. 7: Cahirnane House; childhood home of Katherine Everett.

Source: <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/image-show.jsp?id=1110> accessed on 10 Sept. 2013.



Fig. 8: Muckross House; childhood home of Jane, Countess of Bantry, and marital home of Mary Herbert.

Source :<http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/property-show.jsp?id=1669> accessed on 10 Sept. 2013.

Limerick



Fig 9: Cahirmoyle, marital home of Mary O'Brien and Mabel O'Brien. Childhood home of Charlotte Grace O'Brien, Lucy Gwynn and Nelly O'Brien. Source: The Lawrence Photograph Collection, NLI.



Fig 10: Mount Trenchard, childhood home of Mary O'Brien. Source: Landed Estates Database, <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/property-show.jsp?id=2274> accessed on 10 Sept. 2013.

Tipperary



Fig. 11: Inch, home of the Ryan family.

Source: Landed Estates Database,
<http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/property-show.jsp?id=4247> accessed on 10 Sept. 2013.

England



Fig. 12: Moor Park, Ludlow, Shropshire, childhood home of the heiress, Ethel, Lady Inchiquin, Inchiquin Papers, NLI/MS/45,527/2.

Chapter 1: Home and Duty

Introduction

A beautiful, idle day. In London the season is in full swing ... Lord Bernard ...told me I ought to go to town and “show myself” (his words). I am sure from a worldly point of view he is right...

I have thought it well over and my answer to the world is No. I shall stay here where I have Nature, beauty and peace. I will and do share this lovely home with many people...Best of all Mother and my brothers and sisters will come and my dear Bellemere [*sic*, mother-in-law] and my friends. This is a perfect place for the children, who could not be happier than they are. Our being here makes a vast difference to many: our own people, the “neighbours”, the “poor dears”, and – to M[ary]. C[arbery].⁸⁶

- Lady Carbery, c.1900

This passage from Lady Carbery’s diary cultivates the image of separate public and private spheres, so acclaimed in nineteenth-century advice literature, and damned by nineteenth-century feminists.⁸⁷ Mary presents the home as a safe haven; as somewhere private and peaceful; a place where ‘Nature’ lives. It is presented as the antithesis to the public London. The home is where she and her children belong. In this passage, she claims to prefer to stay at home in the natural setting, and to allow her family to come and visit her there. However, Mary’s outlook was not so simplistic in reality.

When discussing historians’ ‘preoccupation with the ideology of separate spheres’ Amanda Vickery has astutely commented that ‘[w]omen, like men, were eminently capable of professing one thing and performing quite another.’⁸⁸ This extract from Mary’s diary might suggest that she was a shy and retiring character. She was not. The same woman was a published author and travelled in Europe in a customised gypsy caravan. She dressed in the latest fashions and took great pleasure in the attentions of men – she had two

⁸⁶ Sandford (ed.), *Lady Carbery’s West Cork Journal 1898-1901* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 55-6.

⁸⁷ F. Nightingale, *Cassandra* (1852); ‘The electoral disabilities of women’, *Irish Times*, 16 Apr., 1870; T. Haslam, *The Women’s Advocate*, 1 Apr. 1874; I. Tod, *On the education of girls of the middle classes* (London, 1874) for examples of early feminist viewpoints.

⁸⁸ Vickery, ‘Separate spheres’ pp. 401, 391.

husbands and numerous proposals.⁸⁹ She was, however, emotionally attached to her home. This attachment did not equate to her being a weak and submissive woman of the idealised Victorian type. A clue to her strength, and sense of self-importance, is evident in the last sentence. Mary firmly believed that her presence on the family estate made a positive difference to the lives of the local population. They were 'her people', and even at the turn of the century, she viewed herself as protector and leader of the locality. The natural order, in her mind, saw her caring fondly for her dependents, while they worked for her and showed her deference. The women of this class had a sense of purpose in their home life, and the role of landlord's wife allowed a woman to exert a good deal of influence.

This class were defined by where they lived. In the wider British context they were the 'landed class', and in Ireland, they were the residents of the 'Big House.' So, while the women of this class were rarely engaged in public employment, their husbands seldom were either. Instead, they lived off the unearned proceeds of their estate's rental. While husbands or brothers might add glory to the family name by taking a seat in parliament, or joining the army, the female role within the home was also essential to the success of the family, and by extension the class. It was through the home that the social mores of their class were developed. Unlike the ideal middle-class couple – where the husband went out into the world to work, while the wife stayed at home to attend to domestic duties – among the landed class, this demarcation between the spheres of work and of home was blurred. For this class, household management, and the duties of staff supervision, hosting parties, and overseeing provisions all took on great importance. It was through their homes that the class maintained their prestige. For landed women then, the domestic world was not a small sheltered space, but a place where they had the responsibility of upholding their family's established reputation, or creating a more illustrious one. The female duties

⁸⁹ Sandford (ed.), *West Cork Journal*, p. 104.

on the estate were valued and respected by their families, and could give women a sense of fulfilment.

However, not all women could achieve a high status within the family. While the female role of wife was highly valued by this class, no comparable alternative was provided for those women who did not marry, but wanted to remain in the family home. Even those women who did marry might lose their position, and become essentially homeless, on widowhood, or on the occasion of their son's marriage. Lady Carbery might have felt that her marital house was a 'lovely place,' and she expressed a sense of ownership over it, but when her son came of age and married, it was no longer her home, and she could not prevent him from selling it. The women of the landed class had a complex relationship with the Big House. It was their home, their schoolroom and their workplace, yet, it was rarely truly theirs.

The role of wife

Married women were often more attached to their marital home than the house of their birth family. Lady Gregory devoted much more of her writing to Coole, the house and estate of her husband and son, while almost ignoring Roxborough, which had been home for the first twenty-eight years of her life.⁹⁰ Her marital home allowed her to combine duty and fulfilment, and she used her skills and enterprising nature to ensure her son inherited an economically viable estate.⁹¹ The role of wife, and that of young widow holding the estate in trust for a son, gave the women of this class the potential to grow, and to challenge themselves. Fitted with a sense of duty towards their husband's estate, and his future heirs, these women, contributed to the success of their home and estate in a number of ways. This research would suggest that wives were active partners in the estate, and husband and wife worked together to ensure success for the family. The power

⁹⁰ Elizabeth Grubgeld, 'The auto-biographies of Anglo-Irish women', in Susan Shaw Sailer, *Representing Ireland: gender, class, nationality* (Florida, 1997), pp. 133-55: 136-7.

⁹¹ J. Hill, *Lady Gregory: an Irish life* (Cork, 2011). pp. 37,123,139,448.

dynamic between couples varied according to their personalities. A husband might be the more dominant spouse in all respects, but conversely a number of women were strong matriarchs, managing their houses, husbands and families with authority. Among the majority of couples, marriages were companionate, with the partners taking complementary roles. It is significant that the position of dominance of such women as Viscountess Doneraile, who organised her and her husband's living arrangements,⁹² and the Countess of Bantry, who only paid lip-service to her husband's authority,⁹³ were praised by their contemporaries.⁹⁴ However, Earl Ferrers, who married the countess' daughter, Ina, and curtailed his wife's freedoms was deemed 'posessive' and was censured by her family.⁹⁵ K.D. Reynolds used the theory of 'incorporated wives' when she examined aristocratic women during the mid-Victorian period, and the same premise can be used here. Reynolds wrote that 'women incorporated into new families, could and did play active parts, far beyond the question of alliances and the production of a suitable number of heirs.'⁹⁶ The success of the family and estate was desired by both husband and wife, so both partners assisted in the other's designated roles. Ostensibly, men looked after the management of the estate and the male indoor and outdoor staff; they managed capital expenditure on the estate. Women, meanwhile, recruited and supervised the female staff, managed the stores and the appearance of the house and gardens, and organised entertaining. In reality, both spouses assisted the other when necessary. As Peterson observed in her study of upper-middle class families;

Their husbands took the public credit for the task performed – these were not “dual careers,” ...These were “single career families,” but both husband and wife partook of that single career. And among family, friends, and co-workers the wife's contribution was known and acknowledged.⁹⁷

⁹² Viscountess Doneraile to Lord Castletown, 9 Apr. 1876, R1, Bisbrooke Hall Papers.

⁹³ Countess Bantry to 3rd Earl Bantry, 12, 14 May 1874, IE/BL/EP/B/2395.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth E. Gore to Countess Bantry, n.d. [1880], IE/BL/BP/B/2512.

⁹⁵ Everett, *Bricks*, pp. 43-4, 54.

⁹⁶ Reynolds, *Aristocratic women*, p. 16.

⁹⁷ Peterson, *Family, love and work*, pp. 166, 164, 184.

This observation is no less true for the wives of Irish landlords than it was for the wives of English clergy or medical men.

Wife as manager

Recruitment of men servants was technically the husband's responsibility, but in 1906, Ethel, Lady Inchiquin recruited and tested a new chauffeur while her husband was away, and informed him of the new employee (Fig. 15).⁹⁸ Husbands also assisted their wives in the work of the interior world of home. While in Dublin, Esther Grehan's husband, Stephen, interviewed a cook for her and decided she would do.⁹⁹ When Mary O'Brien was seriously ill in 1867, her husband took on the task, under her guidance, of recruiting a nurse.¹⁰⁰ That these men tried to carry out their wives' tasks, demonstrates that the role of servant manager was considered important.

Terence Dooley was incorrect then to dismiss women's roles as mistress of their households and manager of the female servants¹⁰¹, since these roles were essential to the preservation of the family's status. These duties demanded good management and business acumen and were valued within the family. In her childhood memoir, Lady Carbery portrayed herself as having no concept of money, and proclaimed that it was coarse to talk of it.¹⁰² As a widow, her friend who examined her 'money matters' reprimanded her for spending 'large sums which should have come out of the estate'.¹⁰³ With 'a clear thousand a year jointure besides ...Canon Brewery dividends', she had little need to be concerned about her pecuniary matters. However, acting as caretaker of the family estate until her son came of age, she could not be oblivious to financial considerations. In reality, women could be heavily involved in managing the various economic pressures on the estate, especially towards the end of the period under review.

⁹⁸ Ethel, Lady Inchiquin to 15th Baron Inchiquin, n.d. [July 1909], NLI/MS/45,504 (4).

⁹⁹ Esther Grehan, diary entry, 28 Sept., 1895, IE/BL/EP/G/840.

¹⁰⁰ Mary O'Brien to Edward O'Brien, 25 and 28 June 1867, NLI/MS/36,756/2.

¹⁰¹ Dooley, *Decline*, p. 70.

¹⁰² Mary Carbery, *Happy World*, p. 9.

¹⁰³ Sandford (ed.), *West Cork Journal*, p. 59.

Ethel, Lady Inchiquin, who had brought a large portion to her marriage in 1896, played an active part in the precarious task of controlling their heavy mortgage repayments. When away from home in 1907 she wrote:

[We]e must be careful that the guarantors consent to this & promise to keep their promise, what do you think about this, it seems as if all chance of repayment were put off indefinitely. From what sum is that £10, 000 paid to Lloyds? Is it from our loans? Please explain this to me. Could we wait before signing anything till next week, when we can meet them on Saturday[?]

Perhaps a pang of guilt over her recent pleasure seeking in London made her add: 'Please tell Carter not to send away more flowers we have plenty in the garden'.¹⁰⁴ Some years later, she wrote to her husband, who was abroad for medical treatment, that she had paid the £2,400 she had received for felled trees into the loan account, 'so that is a good thing', and in 1909 she wrote; 'I will send £400 to Eddie – it is very important we buy cattle for these lands.'¹⁰⁵ These women also carefully documented expenditure on servants, and were sure to get the best value they could from their staff.¹⁰⁶

The task of servant manager was essential to the family and increased these women's sense of self importance. They perceived their role, not only as managers of servants for their own family, but trainers of a better class of servants for society. In this way, their actions harked back to the noble tradition whereby servants were part of one's household. These women were more connected to the traditional management style described in Amanda Vickery's *Gentleman's Daughter* than to the new commercialisation and professionalisation of domestic service. Like Lady Willoughby de Broke, who wrote 'An employer's conclusions' in C.V. Butler's 1916 report for the Women's Industrial Council on

¹⁰⁴ Ethel, Lady Inchiquin, to 15th Baron Inchiquin, 10 Sept. 1907, NLI/MS/45,504 (emphasis original).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 28 June [1909], NLI/MS/45,504.

¹⁰⁶ For more on servant management see Maeve O'Riordan, 'Assuming control: elite women as household managers in late nineteenth-century Ireland' in Ciaran O'Neill (ed.), *Irish elites in the nineteenth century* (Dublin, 2013), pp. 83-98.

Domestic Service¹⁰⁷, these female employers believed that they knew what was best for their servants. As with Lady Carbery in the opening quotation – they were important to ‘their’ people. When planning her time in London in the spring of 1876, Viscountess Doneraile decided to bring her head housemaid to the London house, as the experience of working in the capital would give the servant the necessary skills to ‘better herself’.¹⁰⁸ She decided the other housemaids were not yet ready, and left them behind in Doneraile.¹⁰⁹

Evidence of the traditional view of employers having responsibility for their servants is further demonstrated in surviving correspondence between servants and their mistresses, and by wills. Ethel, Lady Inchiquin wrote a will six months after her wedding in 1896. In it she remembered her governess, Fraulein Hopp, with a bequest of £50.¹¹⁰ In the first codicil to her will, dated 1916, she revoked earlier bequests to servants, possibly because they had died, but bequeathed ten pounds to her maid, ‘if she shall have been in my service at the time of death for ten years.’ She was more generous to Ellen Reynolds, her housemaid, to whom she bequeathed ‘the yearly sum of twelve pounds during her life.’¹¹¹ Mary O’Brien’s relationship with her servants also went beyond the professional, on occasion. Before her marriage in 1863, she took the time to write and inform an old servant, Jane, of her engagement. When Jane heard the news of the impending nuptials she immediately set to work on a pair of slippers, and requested:

please dear Miss Mary to accept them – (as a humble tribute of my affection) ...
you once kindly promised me your Photo – will you be so good – as give me one...

¹⁰⁷ Lady Willoughby de Broke, ‘An employer’s conclusions’, in C.V. Bulter, *Domestic service: an enquiry by the Women’s Industrial Council* (London, 1916), from p. 100. The Women’s Industrial Council was a British organisation founded in 1894. Its members investigated the working conditions of women in a number of trades, and wrote reports in an effort to improve these conditions. For a brief synopsis see J. Hannam, ‘Women’s Industrial Council,’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.library.ucc.ie/view/theme/96080?back=.37196> accessed on 3 Aug. 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Viscountess Doneraile to Lord Castletown, 9 Apr. 1876, R1, Bisbrooke Hall Papers.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ First codicil to the will of Ethel, Lady Inchiquin, 1916, NLI/MS/45,501/1.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

It was rare for servants to stay in the same position for long. O’Riordan, ‘Assuming control’.

affectionate duty and love to you dear Miss Mary I beg always to describe myself as your attached Servant¹¹²

These women could be benevolent employers, provided that their staff acted in a suitably deferential manner. It suited their goal of having a well-run household to have mutually compatible staff. Esther Grehan decided to send one of her servants, named Elizabeth, home from France, for an easier life for herself, as her child's nurse was complaining about her. She wrote to her husband that she would dismiss her:

If I can get a good substitute here which I expect I can. I am making enquiries – Nurse is most anxious I should – of course she would have to look more after baby – but Elizabeth has made things so disagreeable for her – she will be easier to please.¹¹³

Viscountess Doneraile moved to France in her widowhood. While there, in a smaller house than her marital home, she became closely aware of the clashes and rivalries between her servants downstairs. She wrote to her son-in-law that she had terminated her butler's employment 'on a moment's notice' because he had upset the balance of power downstairs, and did not act as deferentially as she would have liked.¹¹⁴ As a widow without a man of her class sharing her house, it was important that she maintained authority. This man had been 'insolent' towards her, and she reported that 'I told him to go & pack up & in an hour's time I had him out of the house.' She decided she would 'never again' hire a butler, though she might get in a footman when entertaining as 'the inconvenience of remaining manless is very great'.¹¹⁵ The role of recruiter and manager of servants was one where these women could exert their influence over other people. It demanded a good deal of attention, as servants changed their position regularly.¹¹⁶ This role gave them a sense of duty, and of their own importance, both to their families, and to their employees.

¹¹² Jane H. to Mary Spring-Rice, 6 July [1863], NLI/MS/36,769.

¹¹³ Esther Grehan to Stephen Grehan, 1 Dec. 1885, IE/BL/EP/G/704.

¹¹⁴ Viscountess Doneraile to Lord Castletown, 5 Nov. 1895, NLI/MS/35,298/1.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Mona Hearn, *Below stairs: domestic service remembered in Dublin and beyond, 1880-1922* (Dublin, 1993), pp. 78-9.

Wife as hostess

The Viscountess of Doneraile felt it was necessary to bring in a footman 'to wait at table' when she had guests. Footmen were an expected presence in the wealthier houses. From this decision, it is clear that the Viscountess took the role of hostess seriously. These houses were much more than family homes. They were the centres, and the expression, of ascendancy culture. The exercise of hosting – and the position of hostess – was considered extremely important.¹¹⁷ Leading political hostesses, such as Ladies Palmerston, Waldegrave and Granville, were perceived by the press, and the political world, to wield substantial power.¹¹⁸ Conspicuous entertaining was used by the Guinness brothers and their wives to aid their progress towards the peerage.¹¹⁹ Hosting was not an adjunct exercise; it was a respected and valued method of cementing class and party solidarity, and Disraeli lamented in 1876 that there was 'not a solitary dinner or a single drum' to keep the party together.¹²⁰

Political entertainment took place in private homes, but such events were far from private. They demonstrate the dichotomy between idealised womanhood in retirement in the home, and the busy reality of their lives. In no way could these homes be described as a truly private sphere.¹²¹ Theresa, the sixth Marchioness of Londonderry, for example, held evening receptions which 'could be attended by 2,000 guests,' and there were reports of people fainting as a result of 'sheer overcrowding.'¹²² Entertaining of this kind was not to be undertaken lightly, and it gave these women considerable political clout. Recurring

¹¹⁷ Reynolds, *Aristocratic women*, p. 171, 174. See also D. Urquhart, *The ladies of Londonderry: politics, patronage and power* (London, 2007), p. 82-6, E. Macknight, 'Cake and conversation: the women's jour in Parisian high society, 1880-1914,' *French History*, vol. 19, no. 3 (2005), pp. 342-363:342.

¹¹⁸ Reynolds, *Aristocratic women*, p. 172-3.

¹¹⁹ A. Bielenberg, 'Late Victorian elite formation and philanthropy: the making of Edward Guinness,' *Studia Hibernica*, No. 32 (2002/3), pp. 133-154: 136.

¹²⁰ Reynolds, *Aristocratic women*, p. 171.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

¹²² Urquhart, *Ladies of Londonderry*, p. 85.

invitations to such events could do much for a young politician's career, or a literary man's respectability.¹²³

When covering such entertainments, newspapers generally reported that the parties were hosted by the woman of the family. It was only when the politician's wife was judged a reclusive or incompetent woman, who failed in her duties as a political hostess, that events were reported as having been hosted by the husband.¹²⁴ Correspondence in this sample reveals that even when spouses conferred on the guest list, or if the party was primarily the husband's idea, the invitation would be written by the wife, and the party given in her name.¹²⁵ Some members of the political scene believed that a wife who refused to entertain in the accepted manner was a liability to her husband's career.¹²⁶ K.D. Reynolds correctly argues that despite this power, these women were not the 'precursors of the female suffragists', but rather 'the end of a long tradition of aristocratic government', stretching back to Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire and beyond.¹²⁷

For commentary on the entertaining practices of those landed women who operated outside this illustrious political circle, it is necessary to turn to broader survey works such as Jessica Gerard's *Country House Life*. Gerard has argued that the aristocracy and the gentry had different aims when entertaining, and that different tiers of the landed class 'did not usually mix'. She has suggested that for the gentry, as opposed to the aristocracy, 'social circles were confined to kin and neighbours [and] guests enlivened rather than disrupted family life.'¹²⁸ In her opinion, the social role of hospitality 'only became crucial when daughters came out,' but she nonetheless suggested that 'this leisure

¹²³ Reynolds, *Aristocratic women*, p. 169.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 170.

¹²⁵ Lord Castletown to Lady Castletown. [1896], R3, Bisbrooke Hall Papers.

¹²⁶ Reynolds, *Aristocratic women*, pp. 179-80.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 153.

¹²⁸ Gerard, *County House Life*, p. 130.

class took its recreation seriously.¹²⁹ She found that it was the woman's job to organise hospitality for their social circle in order to 'uphold her husband's position, maintain the family's reputation, further his and the children's interests, and demonstrate class solidarity.'¹³⁰

Gerard was slightly misguided in drawing a line between the gentry and aristocracy in this way. Women in all tiers of the landed class, whether a leading hostess, or the wife of a country gentleman who rarely went to London, carried out the joint purpose of maintaining family links and upholding their husbands' position. If only a handful of women could be accurately described as political hostesses, the same protocols were followed by the more provincial gentry and aristocracy. Not every family in this sample possessed a London house, but they all entertained on a scale befitting their rank. In fact, hosting family members, while emotionally rewarding, also served the purpose of cementing class solidarity; and connections across the Irish Sea. The primary responsibility for the organisation and the success of these events was held by the leading woman in the family.

Terence Dooley has observed the enthusiasm of this class for visiting each other.¹³¹ Elizabeth, later to be Lady Leigh, wrote to her father in October 1871, 'after the most delightful visit we ever paid in our lives', when she, her mother and brother visited her married sister, Olive, Lady Ardilaun, and her husband Arthur, at their Co. Mayo home. The party had included a fireworks display and a trip in Ardilaun's yacht. Instead of going home, the guests continued on to visit other families:

The whole party broke up today, the Lanes going to Dublin en route for England, & the Colthursts South & Lord Clonbrook & his girls off too ...Tomorrow we go on to

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 128.

¹³¹ Dooley, *Decline*, p. 55.

Kilkenny where we arrive rather late ... Mother stays about 5 or 6 days with Lady Ormonde.¹³²

The importance of making a good impression on such guests was recognised by all members of the family, male and female, and significant sums were spent to give the wife's hosting skills the perfect backdrop. Houses were built to facilitate entertaining right up to the end of the nineteenth century. The Grehan family built a new house, Clonmeen, in 1893, which highlighted their entertaining ambitions and contained ten, non-nursery bedrooms, many complete with adjoining dressing rooms.¹³³ The number of guests who stayed with the Grehans increased with the building of the new house. There were a total of 266 overnight visitors between 1887 and 1893, but there were 113 signatories in the visitor book for the year 1894.¹³⁴ There were visitors on almost one third of nights, and with some guests staying for longer, there were few enough nights when the family were not playing host to someone. Overnight guests included members of the peerage as well as family members.¹³⁵ The centrality of entertaining in the Grehan home can be seen in this hectic day recorded in Esther's diary for May 1894:

Went to see Mrs. Leader in morning. The Aldworths came to lunch at 1.30 and did not leave till 5.30!! At 4.40p.m. I got a telegram saying Mr Barry & Mrs[,] two of his girls and Harold were coming to dine and sleep – He sent the telegram early and it should have been sent to me sooner – The Jones, Capt Mrs & 2 daughters called & had tea.¹³⁶

This was a busy, but not atypical day. Her family were not involved in London society, but they preserved strong ties with the local landed elite. Although this period was marked by the financial decline and ruin of numerous Irish estates, lavish entertainment was continued, despite the large costs incurred.¹³⁷

¹³² Lady Elizabeth White to William, 3rd Earl Bantry, 19 Oct 1871, IE/BL/EP/G/2437.

¹³³ Architectural plans of Clonmeen House [1893], IE/BL/EP/G/374.

¹³⁴ Visitor Book, Clonmeen, IE/BL/EP/G/1396.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Esther Grehan, Diary Entry, 19 May 1894, IE/BL/EP/G/839.

¹³⁷ Dooley, *Decline*, pp. 54-5.

Manners and rules of good society, or solecisms to be avoided, a successful etiquette manual, devoted a chapter to hostesses, but, tellingly, none to hosts, though their specific entertaining duties were mentioned.¹³⁸ The guide described the qualities of one who held the 'enviable reputation' of being a perfect hostess. Such a woman could put each guest at ease with her 'faculty of saying the right thing at the right moment and to the right person,' and possessed a 'courteous bearing evincing so plainly that she is entirely mistress of the situation.' This was contrasted to the more common 'good hostess' who 'makes up for the brighter qualities in which she is lacking by her extreme consideration towards her guests.' Other hostesses failed through shyness or disorganisation.¹³⁹

The hostess was held responsible for the success of the event, and the worst hostesses, according to the manual, were those who were selfish or procrastinating. If a hostess was not suitably 'self-possessed', it could result in an 'inharmonious evening, with a host whose brow is clouded and a hostess whose manner is abashed.'¹⁴⁰ Such pressure also revealed itself in the writings of these landed families, and even a friend could be cutting when the food, the company, or the housekeeping, did not live up to expectations.¹⁴¹ When Mary O'Brien was first married, she struggled to adjust to her new role as hostess. In marriage, Mary was promoted from being just one of her parents' numerous daughters, to being the prime hostess. She described the challenges of the new wife to her mother, when she and her husband entertained seven guests, many of them family:

I am sorry to say that I behaved very ill. I could not realize that I was an important member and consequently just as luncheon was being served, finding my hair untidy I went off to get it put up, & forgot how discourteous I must appear, till Ed[ward] came thundering at my door to know what I was doing. Even then I was

¹³⁸ Anon., 'A member of the aristocracy', *Manners and rules of good society: or solecisms to be avoided by a member of the aristocracy*, thirty-third edition, (first publ. 1911, Elibron 2004) pp. 234-238; see also 15th edn 1888, 26th edn 1902.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 235.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 236-7.

¹⁴¹ Sandford (ed.), *West Cork Journal*, p. 101; Esther Grehan, diary entry, 10 Dec. 1896, IE/BL/EP/G/841.

at first perplexed to know why they had not begun without me. Next I entirely forgot to offer Mr Gwynn & Charlie who came late, any luncheon, & for ab[ou]t 1/2 hour they sat & looked at the cold remains till Lucy asked if they had any! I really never thought I should have been such a donkey. They seemed however to be pleasantly amused at my mistakes & laughed at my concern and contrition.¹⁴²

Despite this being a largely family affair, and a mere luncheon rather than a more formal dinner party, this letter reveals the importance placed on successful entertaining, and the importance of the hostess in facilitating such events.

The central role of the hostess is even more evident in the following letter where Jane, Countess of Bantry doubted if her husband, at home without her, could be trusted to host the Duke of Abercorn, the Lord Lieutenant, who intended to visit Bantry.

I wrote to you some few days ago that I had accepted for you & me to go to Castle Bernard... On the 1st of next month – till the 8th or 9th – I had asked the Duke to come to Bantry from Castle Bernard and he accepted “for one day or two” – Can you receive Him Alone without me – Me sending John over the servants or shall we put Him off altogether. You must answer this at once – so that we must either put Him off at once[,] and then give him time to make other arrangements or – I should write to Lady Georgina & say I could not be there but that you would have them.¹⁴³

The countess had a lot to manage at the time, as she was staying with her eldest daughter Elizabeth in England, who was dangerously ill after giving birth to her second child. This stress affected her health and she was told by her ‘Brain doctor’ that her ‘brain [was] on severe tension’ (emphasis original).¹⁴⁴ In the end the Duke’s visit was cancelled. Her younger daughter, Ina, noticed that the countess’ health improved as soon as she gave up the idea of organising this party from afar: ‘the serious state of the poor little Baby, knocked her up a good deal & made her unfit for a large party at Bantry just immediately. Since however that strain has been removed she seems much better.’¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Mary O’Brien to Ellen Spring-Rice, 14 Sept 1863, NLI/MS/36,758/2.

¹⁴³ Countess Bantry to 3rd Earl Bantry, n.d., 1876 IE/BL/EP/B/2400/2 (emphasis original).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., n.d., 1876 IE/BL/EP/B/2400 /11.

¹⁴⁵ Lady Ina White to 3rd Earl Bantry, 1876, IE/BL/EP/B/2489.

The type of entertainment which guests were invited to was an indication of their relative status. Guests of greater importance were taken further inside the home, or asked to stay overnight for a more extended party. Dinner parties, necessarily, were more intimate gatherings than garden parties as only a certain number could be accommodated around the dinner table. *Manners and Rules* described hosting guests to dinner as 'the most important of all social observances, therefore dinner parties rank first amongst all entertainments.'¹⁴⁶ If Mary O'Brien's family lunch party involved a prescribed etiquette, then dinner was an even more elaborate affair. A hostess could be judged on such seemingly harmless issues as uneven numbers of men and women at dinner.¹⁴⁷ Guests were seated according to precedence, and so seating arrangements might demand careful study of the plethora of directories and guides available, as seniority between those of the same rank was determined according to the longevity of their title or commission.¹⁴⁸

It appears that these women took the prescribed seating order seriously. It did not always lead to the most enjoyable evening for guests, as people of diverse ages and interests could be thrown together owing to their rank.¹⁴⁹ The popularity of this system is demonstrated by one exceptional evening in Castlefreke, when Lady Carbery found herself too tired to carry out the hostess's duty of determining the order in which her house guests should sit at dinner. The rule book was thrown out, and everyone thoroughly enjoyed the novelty of the new arrangements. Her relative, the Earl of Bandon, suggested

sending husbands and wives in together, binding them to be as charming to one another as they were when they were merely engaged. It was a great success...and the flirting which went on scandalized the bewildered footmen. The one bachelor and the one spinster took one another in and I was the odd man out. Great fun.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Anon., *Manners and rules*, p. 99.

¹⁴⁷ Anon., 'Thirteen to dinner', Moor Park Visitor Book, NLI/MS/14,880.

¹⁴⁸ Anon., *Manners and rules*, pp. 103-4 and 50.

¹⁴⁹ Sandford (ed.), *West Cork Journal*, p. 60.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

The degree of planning to be carried out by the hostess in preparation for such a large entertaining event is revealed in a series of letters between Ellen, Lady Inchiquin and her husband, 14th Baron Inchiquin, in the week commencing on the third of December 1878 in reference to a proposed shooting party.¹⁵¹ Shooting parties might be presumed to be almost exclusively masculine affairs, but they played an important, and valued, part in the female calendar too. Esther Grehan appeared to take enjoyment from any shoots which took place at Clonmeen; she and the other women often drove to meet the shooters for lunch, but sometimes she 'walked and beat all day', and often they and their guests would dance after dinner.¹⁵² In the early-twentieth century her daughters also walked with the guns and occasionally acted as beaters.¹⁵³ Women only rarely took a more active part in the shoot, and a cartoon in Lady Castletown's scrapbook suggests the extent to which it was against convention (fig. 29). Perhaps this toleration on the part of the female members of the family of a predominantly masculine pursuit on the family estate, was a demonstration of these women taking pleasure from the knowledge that a successful shooting party was a demonstration of wealth and careful management.

Ellen was dreadfully disappointed to cancel the 1878 shooting party because her husband could not come home. He suggested postponing it for a week, but Ellen put people off altogether as 'of course one can't get together again a party of that sort. If we have another it will only be a scratch one' with many of the guests already planning to travel to England the following week.¹⁵⁴ She would prefer to have no party, rather than one that could be remembered as being below par by guests. Her photograph album, and the visitor book at Dromoland show that she organised a number of other successful parties.¹⁵⁵ It is likely that these photos acted both as mementos of happy occasions, and as trophies of

¹⁵¹ Ellen, Lady Inchiquin to 14th Baron Inchiquin, NLI/MS/45,473/2.

¹⁵² For example see Esther Grehan diary entries; 19, 20 Oct., 4 Nov., 21 Dec., 1894, IE/BL/EP/G/839.

¹⁵³ 'Family Journal' October 1902, IE/BL/EP/G/1391.

¹⁵⁴ Ellen, Lady Inchiquin to 14th Baron Inchiquin, 4 Dec. 1878, NLI/MS/45,473/2.

¹⁵⁵ Photograph Album, NLI/MS/14,787; Visitor Book, NLI/MS/14,500.

proud social achievements. Such books could then be shared with other guests to demonstrate the calibre of people who had stayed at Dromoland. Lady Gregory, one of the most famous members of the Irish landed elite, acted in a similar way. She used both her fan and autograph book to collect the signatures of her more illustrious guests, which could then be used as an expression of her and her family's connections to the political and literary elite.¹⁵⁶

When access to tertiary education was granted to women, the *Lady of the House*, a middle and upper-class relatively liberal Irish journal,¹⁵⁷ asked readers to comment on the most suitable profession for women. It was recommended that women in search of a profession should study architecture, as '[i]t is right and wise that a woman should plan or direct the building of a house which is to be the sight of her own or some other woman's kingdom.'¹⁵⁸ These women felt that they could make a valuable contribution to the aesthetic of their home and garden, both of which were on display when the family were hosting guests. Mabel O'Brien née Smyly told her fiancé of her plans to get a plate cupboard for their Dublin house to protect their budding collection, 'all lined with baize and with baize flaps to hang between the shelves to keep out tarnish. That attracts me very much'.¹⁵⁹ In their engagement letters, the couple also discussed how best to redesign the reception rooms. She planned the position of the nursery, and the re-aligning of the stairs. She included sketches in her letters to make sure he understood her plans¹⁶⁰ Katherine Everett went even further, and actually designed and oversaw the building of her family's house. To supervise the new project, she 'had set up in a pine-wood on our ground a large, heather thatched hut...and a tent for my boys during their holidays.' She had business

¹⁵⁶ George Moore felt snubbed when he was not asked to sign her fan and Sir Edwin Arnold, poet-laureate candidate in 1892, was. A. Pilz, 'The Irish Protestant landed class and negotiations of power', in C. O'Neill, *Irish elites* (2013), pp. 185-196: 187-8.

¹⁵⁷ O. Walsh, *Anglican women*, p. 52.

¹⁵⁸ *Lady of the House*, 15 Apr. 1903, quoted in O. Walsh, *Anglican women*, p. 62.

¹⁵⁹ Mabel O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, 29 Jan. 1902, NLI/MS/36,699/2.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, NLI/MS/36,699/3.

cards printed, and oversaw the purchase of every detail; from the bricks to the wood, and kept time-sheets and accounts.¹⁶¹ As she had married out of the class, she and her husband were not tied to living on a family estate.

Ethel, Lady Inchiquin, who was an heiress in charge of her own fortune, was careful to preserve the appearance of Dromoland Castle for her descendents. She was conscious of the importance of tradition, and bequeathed important heirlooms to the estate, rather than to an individual heir. Despite the near-dire financial position of the estate, she collected items to augment the prestige of the family. These included pieces to decorate the house, and jewellery to be worn by the estate-owner's wife:

any portraits of my family which I now have or hereafter may become possessed of, the crystal cup and plate bought at the Borghese sale, the tall crystal vase bought at the Spritzer sale, my emerald and diamond engagement ring, my ruby and diamond ring, my pearl and diamond coronet, pearl necklace, emerald and diamond pendant and two large pearl drops...Upon trust to allow the same to devolve as heirlooms together with the said mansion house of Dromoland...such heirlooms will not vest absolutely in any person.¹⁶²

She was also careful to preserve her own separate estate of Moor Park in all its wealth, and bequeathed all 'plate and plated Articles, goods, Pictures, prints, furniture, China, Glass and Household effects ... at Moor Park to the owner in entail of Moor Park'.¹⁶³

When Lady Castletown wrote her will she failed to show Ethel's foresight, and left everything to her husband rather than to the estate.¹⁶⁴ She therefore prevented the future occupant from entertaining in a manner which befitted his rank. Ethel St Ledger, brother of the heir presumptive, and companion to Lord Castletown during his widowhood wrote:

[A]bout the furniture[,] it is the case that it all belongs to Barney and it is because of Lady [Castletown]'s will – every one is furious...I had a sleepless night in

¹⁶¹ K. Everett, *Bricks*, pp. 136-137.

¹⁶² Will of Ethel, Lady Inchiquin, 1916, NLI/MS/45,501/1.

¹⁶³ 'Short Precis [sic] of my will' Ethel, Lady Inchiquin, 1906, NLI/MS/45,501.

¹⁶⁴ Will of Lady Castletown, 1907, NLI/MS/35,303/1.

consequence as . . . it's so unfair. This poor old home may go to the next holder of the title without a stick of furniture or a pot or pan in it.¹⁶⁵

Perhaps it was because Lady Castletown had no surviving child of her own, that she was less careful to protect the estate, which would go to a cousin.

Wife as local leader

The gentry and aristocratic families in this study did not only socialise with their own class.

Andy Bielenberg argues that 'the line between the wealthier industrial middle class and the gentry was thin in places and became increasingly permeable in the second half of the nineteenth century.'¹⁶⁶ The industrial elite mimicked the landed class in their housing, pastimes, and the education of their sons.¹⁶⁷ Bielenberg contends that this habit was a new one in the second half of the nineteenth century, but land and title had always been the aspiration for any social climber, and, as he observed, the whiskey distillers, the Power family, had first bought their Co. Wexford estate in the late-eighteenth century.¹⁶⁸ It was only with growing wealth that the number of families who were in a position to be so gentrified increased during the late-nineteenth century. Owing to the post-Famine sales of encumbered estates, a greater opportunity arose for socially ambitious business families to join the gentry class. The Grehan family left the wine trade to take up permanent residence on their country estate in 1860, and further up the scale of wealth, the Guinnesses bought an estate in the west of Ireland in 1852.¹⁶⁹ Reynolds has observed that the aristocracy in England invited members of lower classes to their entertainments, provided that they could behave like aristocrats.¹⁷⁰ Amanda Vickery has found that for the lesser gentry, intermarriage with the commercial class was not at all unusual during the Regency period,

¹⁶⁵ Ethel St Ledger to Edward 6th Viscount Doneraile, Apr. 1929, NLI/MS/34,160.

¹⁶⁶ A. Bielenberg, 'The industrial elite in Ireland from the Industrial Revolution to the First World War', in F. Lane (ed.), *Politics, society and the middle class in modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2010).

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 153, 155-6. F.M.L. Thompson, *English landed society* (London, 1963), p. 129.

¹⁶⁸ Bielenberg, 'Industrial elite', pp. 156-7.

¹⁶⁹ See Carmel Quinn, Introduction to Grehan Collection, IE/BL/EP/G; A. Bielenberg, 'Late Victorian elite formation and philanthropy: the making of Edward Guinness,' *Studia Hibernica*, no. 32 (2002/3), pp. 133-154:135. The original estate grew to about 23,000 acres by 1870.

¹⁷⁰ Reynolds, *Aristocratic women* p. 169. See also, Gerard, *Country house life* p. 130.

and that it is difficult to look at either class in isolation.¹⁷¹ In their role of garden party hostess, women played an important part in facilitating the integration of the two elites, or the assimilation of the business classes into the practices of the landed class. Garden parties provided an opportunity for social interaction on a larger scale than dinner parties, and the guest list was likely to be more varied. Dinner and house parties cemented the standing of their families within the landed class, but garden parties and other outdoor events increased their status in the local community, as *Manners and Rules* suggested:

A series of garden parties is held by the principal ladies of their respective neighbourhoods ...nothing but absence from home, illness, or some equally good reason ... considered sufficient excuse for the non-fulfilment of this social duty.

The county at large expects to be invited at least once a year to roam about in the beautiful park of the lord of the manor, to row on the lake, to play lawn-tennis, to wander...the shrubberies...into the mansion itself...

A garden party is an occasion to offer hospitality to a wide range of guests – people who it would not be convenient to entertain save at this description of gathering.¹⁷²

Lady Castletown was the principal 'lady' in her area. She kept typed lists of families whom she intended to invite to her garden party in 1909. Invitations were ordered from the printers, and each one had to be hand-addressed.¹⁷³ The fact that all of these hand-addressed envelopes are still in the family papers in the National Library of Ireland suggests that this particular party never took place, but it allows one to determine the scale of such events. Almost all of the north Cork gentry were invited, along with a large number from south Limerick and western Tipperary. A small number of upper-middle-class representatives were also invited, representing the medical and finance professions: Dr Montgomery and his wife, Mr and Mrs O'Connell of the Bank of Ireland, and Mr and Mrs Tottenham of the Provincial Bank, Mallow.¹⁷⁴ For a woman such as Lady Castletown who

¹⁷¹ Vickery, *Gentleman's daughter*, p. 352.

¹⁷² Anon., *Manners and rules*, p. 166.

¹⁷³ List of guests, NLI/MS/34,166/9.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

was comfortable in her rank in society, mingling with members of the middle class could not taint her reputation.

Such wide guest lists demanded careful management to ensure all guests felt suitably appreciated, especially those who were at pains to distinguish themselves from the rising classes. Lady Carbery was forced to bear the wrath of one of her garden party guests for a perceived slight:

Miss Mary Hungerford “of the island” believes she has been insulted. ...“And being who I am,” she gobbles, “I am asked to Castle Freke to meet people who are not gentry – even a bank clerk!...I shall be obliged if your butler may send for my cor (car)!¹⁷⁵

Mary Hungerford was only placated with the prospect of having tea ‘quietly inside’ with Lady Carbery and Lady Bandon. Thus, the offended guest was brought in to the more exclusive interior of the house, which, in her own eyes, was a demonstration of her class superiority over other guests. Lady Carbery described this episode of hurt pride with some glee and derision at those who felt it necessary to enforce their social superiority. Carbery and her sister, Mabel, who had ‘a genius for dealing with difficult people’, mocked the lunacy of ‘pride...causing the slugs to despise the worms.’¹⁷⁶ They could look down on the pride of Mary Hungerford as they could both assume that they would always be treated as members of the highest elite.

The lavish display of wealth and hospitality involved in such a garden party could reaffirm the reputation of Lady Castletown as a generous hostess. Lady Castletown used her influence with these same guests to gain their support for her campaign to provide the Doneraile area with a district nurse.¹⁷⁷ Ethel, Lady Inchiquin put a good deal of effort into the organisation of her first garden party at Dromoland Castle in 1900, her first year as

¹⁷⁵ Sandford (ed.), *West Cork Journal*, p. 72.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ See Chapter Two p. 126.

mistress of the castle. She carefully dated and preserved one of the printed programmes she ordered for the day, which recorded the music played by the hired band to entertain guests.¹⁷⁸

These events also allowed women to show off their talents as gardeners; a hobby which was actively pursued by some. In these families, the planning of the garden was often the wife's role. Esther Grehan was responsible for ordering the stock for the garden, and she seems to have been quite enthusiastic and knowledgeable. In 1893 she ordered: '100 large selected imported crowns of lily of the valley', hyacinths, Chinese narcissi, and lilies. The following year she bought '100 ornamental flowering shrubs', water lilies, azaleas, more hyacinths, rhododendrons, copper beach, laburnums, twenty-four mountain ash and forty-eight laurels. In 1896, she bought 100 flower pots and many more flowers. Between 1894 and 1896 Esther also bought over 100 fruit trees, along with stock for the kitchen garden.¹⁷⁹ Earlier, before they were married, Esther had told Stephen of her plans to plant cuttings of unusual trees she had seen at Doneraile Court.¹⁸⁰

Just as important as garden parties, which cemented relations between the conservative elites of the country, were the tenants and labourers' treats, which attempted to foster affectionate relationships between all those who lived on these estates: landlord, tenant and landless labourer. These treats harked back to a feudal era, and reaffirmed the social superiority of the landed family over those who worked the land. The language used to describe these occasions, and indeed the events themselves, can be seen, with hindsight, to have been totally out of place by the late nineteenth century. Still they persisted. It is understandable that the gentry and aristocracy would cling to the traditions of the past where they had enjoyed unchallenged power. However, it is noteworthy that

¹⁷⁸ Garden Party Programme, 1900, NLI/MS/45,524/5.

¹⁷⁹ Esther Grehan, Garden Book, IE/BL/EP/G/848.

¹⁸⁰ Esther Chichester to Stephen Grehan, 18, 28 and 30 Oct. 1882, IE/BL/EP/G/664, 670, 673.

they could find tenants and labourers to participate in these events, right into the twentieth century. When the Grehan heir was born in 1893, the men on the estate 'sang & danced & drank nearly all night'.¹⁸¹ Tenants attended treats, drank their masters' health, raised money for gifts, and read illustrious addresses on the occasion of the heir's or daughters' marriages, even as others were fundraising for the Land League.

When Lady Carbery hosted a tenants' tea, she 'received them all at the terrace gate, 910 handshakes and every one a hearty one' (she had removed her rings in preparation).¹⁸² On the smaller Grehan estate, labourers' feasts were also large-scale affairs. Esther Grehan bought prizes and organised sports before dinner where as many as '50 and 60 people were fed'.¹⁸³ The animals necessary to feed this crowd were taken from the Grehan herd and slaughtered.¹⁸⁴ These parties were not operated on a system of anything like equality. The family did not eat with the tenants and labourers, but in the comfort of their own homes, sometimes with guests of their own class, while the tenants were kept outside in temporary structures. After dinner, the family might dance with the tenants, but always a sense of superiority remained and it was not unusual to comment on the tenants' 'good behaviour'.¹⁸⁵ The hostess's role was moved outside to the demesne. This hospitality was founded in the age-old system of noblesse oblige. Through entertaining their families' tenants, women could foster positive relationships, but also cultivated the image of their family as open-handed, generous, and wealthy. These events allowed these women and their families to ignore the cooling of relations that was occurring between the classes, in general, and to endorse their own particular connection with their tenants and workers.

¹⁸¹ Stephen Grehan, diary entry, 27, 28, June 1893, IE/BL/EP/B/747.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁸³ 'Charity given to workmen', notebook, IE/BL/EP/G/307.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Sandford (ed.), *West Cork Journal*, p. 79.

Events from 1870 led to a decline in the deference shown to landed families by their tenants.¹⁸⁶ There were clashes between landlords, their agents, and their tenants.¹⁸⁷ The methods of persuasion could be violent, and traditional estate celebrations organised by the landlord to strengthen the loyalty of tenants were not viewed in a positive light by hardcore followers of the League. Some landlords felt, and were, unsafe on their own estates, and could no longer expect the regard of their tenants. Laurence Geary has demonstrated the complete breakdown of relations on some landed estates. Lord Carlingford, an absentee landlord, wrote after a visit to Ireland ‘The very air seems charged with hostility and hatred towards England and towards Irishmen also of my class.’¹⁸⁸ In 1881, Baron Colthurst defeated his Ballyvourney tenants’ claims for lower rents ‘by bringing the farms of seventeen ringleaders to execution sales.’ The retribution was an attack on a celebration of the landlord’s marriage. This was an assault on positive inter-class relations, and the celebration of the Colthurst family’s dominance, as the marriage would presumably produce an heir:

A large group of Colthurst’s tenants, comprising about 100 men, women, and children, were gathered in the evening in a field, singing, dancing, and drinking porter in celebration of their landlord’s marriage earlier that day in Cork city. Suddenly, they were encircled by about fifty disguised moonlighters. Upon the leader’s command, shots rang out, felling some, and then the attackers moved in on the dazed remainder, beating them with wooden clubs. Ten persons were wounded, two of them seriously.¹⁸⁹

Against such a backdrop, where tenants were combining against their landlords and withholding their rents – sometimes with the aim of financially destroying the landlord – and so forcing him to sell out at a cut-price to cover his debts, any measures which would

¹⁸⁶ L. Geary, ‘Anticipating memory: landlordism, agrarianism and deference in late nineteenth-century Ireland’ in T. Dunne and L. Geary (eds), *History and the public sphere: essays in honour of John A. Murphy* (Cork, 2005), pp. 127-34, p. 127.

¹⁸⁷ Curtis, ‘Landlord responses’, pp. 146-8.

¹⁸⁸ Lord Carlingford, *Lord Carlingford’s journal: reflections of a cabinet minister, 1885*, (Oxford, 1971) in Geary, *Plan of Campaign*, p. 8.

¹⁸⁹ M. Hussey, letter to *The Times* 10 Sept 1881, *Cork Examiner* 30 Aug., 1881, quoted in Donnelly Jr. *Land and people*, p. 284. See also Bence-Jones, *Twilight*, p. 38. Bence-Jones recorded that the newly married couple went to Ballyvourney to visit the injured, taking a doctor and a reporter with them, but gives no reference.

improve relations, and invoke traditional deference, were important to the landed class.¹⁹⁰ Despite the occurrence of serious and numerous outrages during the 1870s and 1880s,¹⁹¹ these women's surviving writings show that a number of aspects of the traditional landlord-tenant relationship survived, and the class were doing all they could to continue as normal.

Kevin McKenna has described the traditional coming of age celebrations of the heir to the Clonbrock estate in Co. Galway in 1855 and 1890.¹⁹² He has suggested that such events were used both to reaffirm the family's position 'at the apex of the social order', but also to 'maintain a bond of *identification*' between the 'superordinate' and 'subordinate' class.¹⁹³ The celebration at Clonbrock in 1855, which included feasting, dancing, speeches, and a fireworks display, served to strengthen the bond between landlord and tenant, and suggested permanency of rule for the Clonbrock family. By 1890, the 'tenants' address neglected to mention the transmission of the estates from one generation to the next,' as it had done in 1855.¹⁹⁴ The local press also failed to greet the occasion with enthusiasm, and reports of it were found in the advertising pages, signifying that the space had been paid for by the family.¹⁹⁵ This decline was a result of exterior political factors caused by the Land War.

Women were largely invisible in McKenna's article as coming-of-age events were deemed to be as much a celebration of the virility of the father, as of the future of the son.¹⁹⁶ This was not always the case. When the 10th Baron Carbery came of age in 1913, his

¹⁹⁰ Geary, *The Plan of Campaign*, pp. 47, 49.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁹² K. McKenna, 'Elites, ritual and the legitimisation of power on an Irish landed estate, 1855-90', in C. O'Neill (ed.), *Irish elites*.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.* p. 82. In this article, McKenna uses the theory of the 'deferential dialectic', put forward by Howard Newby, in his article of the same name. H. Newby, 'the deferential dialectic', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 17 (1975), pp. 139-64.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 73.

father had been dead for over twenty years, and so Lady Carbery threw a 'grand ball', but also catered for the estate workers with an 'outside party': long tables, a pipe band, and a cartload of drink.¹⁹⁷ Large-scale labourers and tenants dinners or treats were expected on important family occasions such as the birth of an heir, the heir's coming of age, or the landlord's marriage. Not every estate passed from father to son, as some couples only bore daughters. One such family is that of Jonas and Jane Foster of Moor Park, Shropshire, parents of Ethel, who became Lady Inchiquin. Jonas Foster left Jane a widow at a relatively young age, so the estate of Moor Park became a female world. When Ethel Foster, came of age in 1888, her mother had a wooden banquet hall constructed and 100 tenants were given dinner.¹⁹⁸ The scale of this event was easily matched by the celebration of her wedding eight years later.¹⁹⁹ Newspapers could be used to publicise the kindness which the family showed their tenants, the expense they went to, and consequently could afford, and the fealty which they received in return. In this way, what might be considered private entertaining at home became a largely public event which the community at large could share in and admire.

The women involved in such public family events were not ignorant of the physical and economic attacks against their class by their tenants. The Earl of Bantry was a laissez-faire landlord, and only increased his rents by five per cent in the period 1865-1882.²⁰⁰ Nonetheless, there were disputes on the estate, and Bantry was taken to the land courts by his tenants. The subcommissioners doubted whether 'the noble proprietor has done much to assist his tenantry in the way of improvement – the buildings, the fences, and the drains, such as they are, having been made by the peasantry with very little assistance from the

¹⁹⁷ Sandford, 'Epilogue', *West Cork Journal*, p. 140.

¹⁹⁸ Newsclipping, NLI/45,524/2.

¹⁹⁹ See chapter three, p. 179.

²⁰⁰ Donnelly Jnr. *Land and people*, p. 191.

landlord.’ The court reduced rents by nearly twenty per cent.²⁰¹ While not all families were directly affected, they knew of friends and neighbours who were. The Grehans’ close family friends, the Moores of Mooresfort, Co. Tipperary had a bitter feud with their tenants, though they did not, as Donnelly claimed, move permanently to England in 1888.²⁰² In both the Grehan family journal, a hand-produced circular, written in 1902-3, and Katherine Everett’s memoirs, the Land League, as an impersonal threatening force, was blamed for ruining what the author believed, or wanted to believe, were perfectly healthy and paternal landlord-tenant relations. May Grehan wrote that the Land League had destroyed Co. Roscommon saying; ‘alas the Land League, that league which has done so much harm in Ireland... frightened a number of tenants into refusing to pay the rents – land rows followed in the train of evictions & some of the larger landowners went about last year with police following them everywhere as ... their lives might be in danger.’²⁰³ The Roscommon residence of her uncle (Esther’s brother) would be burned down in the 1920s.²⁰⁴ In the 1940s, Everett blamed the Land League for much of Ireland’s troubles. In her memory, her father ‘was a good and generous landlord and his tenants were attached to him, but they belonged to the Land League under whose edict they had to withhold their rents.’²⁰⁵

Lady Castletown followed the events of the Land War closely, and was firmly against the League. Her husband spoke in the House of Lords on the subject, and wrote a pamphlet to air his views. Lady Castletown pasted the reviews of this article into her scrapbook.²⁰⁶ She did not simply follow her husband’s career; she also collected other

²⁰¹ *Cork Constitution* 18 Aug. 1888, referenced in Donnelly, Jnr, *Land and people*, p. 298.

²⁰² Donnelly, Jnr, *Land and people*, p. 382-3. See for e.g. Esther Grehan, diary entry, 16, 28, Sept., 13, Oct., 8, 20, Nov., 1893, 18, 30, Jan., 1895, IE/BL/EP/G/838, 840.

²⁰³ Family Journal 8th Number. May 1903, BL/EP/G/1393.

²⁰⁴ <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/property-show.jsp?id=1311>

²⁰⁵ K. Everett, *Bricks*, p. 33.

²⁰⁶ Bernard Fitzpatrick, M.P., *The A B C of the Irish land question* (London, 1881), reviewed in: *Belfast Newsletter*, 16 Feb. 1881, *Leinster Express*, 26 Feb. 1881, *Vanity Fair*, n.d., in Lady Castletown’s Scrapbook, NLI/MS/3079.

nuggets from the press.²⁰⁷ She treated the Land War with a mixture of concern and humour through the clippings in her scrapbook, and included hand-written poems on the gross injustice perceived by the landowning class:

The Law's on the side of the Lawless
To the tenants' advised not to budge
To defeat both the law & the Lawless
In a manner laid down by the judge
These facts should I think be remembered
When the Landlords together are found
And all sign an earnest round robbin
'Gainst the men who are robbin all round²⁰⁸

There was also a handwritten mock advertisement 'By order of C.S. Parnell'; 'to be sold at any price; that valuable animal "Irish Landlord" ...has good manners and is thoroughly broken'.²⁰⁹

It was far from a joke, however, and the seriousness with which she perceived the threat is evidenced by her collection of League paraphernalia. She picked up a notice offering rewards for information on tenants who disregarded the 'no-rent manifesto' and for information on police spies from a Dublin street, and kept a blank copy of a certificate of subscription to the Irish National Fund, which supported evicted tenants.²¹⁰ Her copy of the oath of allegiance to the Ancient Order of Hibernians, a secret society whose members were alleged to swear 'by virtue of this oath I *will think it is no sin to kill and massacre a Protestant whenever an opportunity serves*', must have caused her some concern, or at least encouraged her to believe that the League could not be allowed to get its way. Castletown obviously conferred with other landlords, and kept a letter sent to a neighbouring landowner, H.H. Barry, from a tenant who pleaded with his landlord that he could not pay his rent because he was terrorised by 'moonlighters', who broke his windows

²⁰⁷ For example see; 'The Irish landlord to the Irish Secretary', *St James' Gazette*, 10 Dec. 1881, 'Verses' *St James' Gazette*, 17 Nov. 1881, 'An Irish stew' *St James' Gazette*, 4 Mar. 1882, in *Ibid*.

²⁰⁸ Anon. Untitled handwritten poem, in *Ibid*.

²⁰⁹ Anon, 'By order of C.S. Parnell', n.d. in *Ibid*.

²¹⁰ Anon. 'Notice', 2 Jan. 1882, in *Ibid*.

and doors and ‘nearly killed [his] son’.²¹¹ Lady Castletown, the Marchionesses of Waterford and Ormonde, and Viscountess de Vesci, were led by the Countess of Kenmare to organise a fund, the ‘Misses Curtin Testimonial Fund’. They produced a pamphlet which illustrated their fears regarding the perceived threats to the existing class structure caused by the Land War. The pamphlet aimed ‘to do honor [sic] to the heroic conduct’ of the Misses Curtin who witnessed the murder of their father who was shot by masked men who entered their home. The Curtin family held a 170 acre farm, let from Lord Kenmare, which was sizeable for Co. Kerry.²¹² They employed three female servants and a number of farm labourers. In the eyes of Countess Kenmare, the greatest insult shown to the two sisters, who were under police protection owing to the death of their father, was the fact that the Miss Curtins were obliged to cook for the police, because the servants refused to do so!²¹³

Some women of this class believed that some landlords failed to observe the responsibilities of the class. Lady Carbery condemned what she viewed as the mercenary aims of a neighbouring landlord, and took some responsibility for the care of his tenants:

Poor creatures! Their farm is too small to keep them after they have paid their rent. The potatoes last year were diseased. The animals died of starvation. If they were to be given a cow today they would sell it tomorrow to pay the rent. Their landlord is an English absentee and cares nothing for the people. “He have the hard heart” they say.²¹⁴

She firmly supported the existing class structure, and many of her own tenants lived in shockingly poor conditions. Nonetheless, she felt superior to this landlord, who was failing in his landlord duties, as she saw them.²¹⁵ Part of these duties was to entertain the tenants. Such traditional entertainments worked to support existing class structures.

²¹¹ Batt Curtin to H.H. Barry, 26 July [n.d.], in Ibid.

²¹² Hoppen, *Elections*, Table 16 p. 91.

²¹³ Gertrude H. Kenmare, ‘Murder of Mr Curtin and heroic behaviour of the Miss Curtins.’ [n.d.], in Lady Castletown’s scrapbook, NLI/MS/3079 (emphasis original).

²¹⁴ Sandford (ed.), *West Cork Journal*, p. 17.

²¹⁵ Ibid. pp. 73, 116-8, 119.

These women also attempted to maintain or cultivate ideal relations with the poor on the estate through estate-based charity. In the existing literature on philanthropy, Dublin and other urban centres have been prioritised ahead of rural areas, where the majority of Irish people lived during this period.²¹⁶ Oonagh Walsh's decision to focus on Dublin for her study of Anglican women 'was determined partly by the available sources which display a significant Dublin bias.'²¹⁷ Only Luddy has made some space for rural philanthropy and the activities of the 'wives, daughters and sisters of landlords', but admitted that she 'concentrated on the expansion of urban charitable endeavour.'²¹⁸ Certainly, there was an explosion of charitable institutions founded in Dublin city, but there was also an active tradition among the Munster women in this study. As we will see in the next chapter, autonomous philanthropic organisations were founded outside of the capital, but informal charitable activity on the family estate is also worth examining.²¹⁹ The primary charitable activity of landed women was totally different from the activities of middle-class women discussed in the existing literature.²²⁰ Ascendancy families had direct access to, and an intimate knowledge of, the poor families who lived on their estate. Oonagh Walsh has argued that philanthropic work is 'inherently political' and that Anglican women in Dublin used philanthropy to strengthen their community in Dublin in the face of a new independent, and predominately Catholic Ireland.²²¹ For the women of the landed class, philanthropy also had a political aspect. This was a conservative political viewpoint that was born out of the traditional landlord-peasant relationship. Doling out gifts to the poor could reinforce hierarchical relationships and secure a loyal local population.

²¹⁶ M. Luddy, *Women and philanthropy in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Cambridge, 1995); M. Preston, *Women, philanthropy, and the language of charity in nineteenth-century Dublin*, (London, 2004); O. Walsh, *Anglican women in Dublin: philanthropy and education in the early twentieth century* (Dublin, 2005).

²¹⁷ O. Walsh, *Anglican women*, p. 4.

²¹⁸ M. Luddy, *Women and philanthropy*, pp. 181-2.

²¹⁹ See chapter two p. 128.

²²⁰ M. Luddy, *Women and philanthropy*, M. Preston, *Charitable words*, p. 8.

²²¹ O. Walsh, *Anglican women*, p. 2.

Jessica Gerard has analysed the rural philanthropic activities of landed women in England and Wales. She has observed that '[o]ver the centuries...annual gifts of food, clothing or fuel had become customary.'²²² This activity was accepted as normal for these women. Gerard has described how children of the landed class in England were indoctrinated into their role as dispensers of charity from an early age, to teach them to expect deference, and the responsibilities of their position.²²³ Lady Carbery wrote of how as a girl in the 1870s she had her 'pet old women' on her family estate in England.²²⁴ It was no different in 1890, on the Grehan estate, when the young May Grehan also seems to have had her 'pet', Biddy Murty, to whom she gave the gift of a dress at Christmas.²²⁵ Katherine Everett remembered, with no sense of unease, that she and her siblings 'named all the babies born on the place'. They labelled two unfortunate boys Daniel Deronda and Decimus, and were disappointed when their mother 'Mrs Delaney added Patrick to Decimus and they degenerated into Patsy and Danny.'²²⁶

Landed women differed from the majority of their middle-class sisters who threw themselves into charitable activity as their actions were a duty to the prestige of their family, rather than their religious faith. They never forgot their own sense of superiority over those they helped. Lady Carbery described the 'Poor Things' she helped as 'desperately poor and feckless'.²²⁷ The potential recipients also recognised the hierarchical nature of such a relationship. In this letter to Lady Castletown, a woman called Anne Corrigan used subservient language in an attempt to extract monetary assistance:

I live far away from your Ladyship, yet I most confidently hope your pure white soul who sees Jesus beneath the rags of the poor will for his sake do a little for me. My sincere prayers for you Sweet Lady & all my benefactresses will Ascend

²²² J. Gerard, 'Lady Bountiful: women of the landed class and rural philanthropy', *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 30. No. 2 (Winter, 1987), pp. 183-210: 186.

²²³ Gerard, *Country house life*, pp. 62-3.

²²⁴ Sandford (ed.), *West Cork Journal*, p. 122.

²²⁵ 'Charity given to Workmen', notebook, IE/BL/EP/G/307.

²²⁶ Everett, *Bricks and flowers*, p. 27.

²²⁷ Sandford (ed.), *West Cork Journal*, p. 17.

before God's high Throne & as God is the source of all riches He will repay You. Come Sweet Lady hearken to my humble request, Charity is an attribute of God Himself.²²⁸

Lady Castletown was reluctant to give Anne Corrigan the money she requested.²²⁹ As it happened, Lady Castletown did not have a strong sense of faith²³⁰, but even if she had, it might not have helped Mrs Corrigan's cause, as like all of these women she preferred to give goods rather than money.²³¹

Estate-based charity confirmed the family's supremacy over their tenants, in a similar way to the celebrations described by McKenna: charity highlighted the differences between the classes, while also harbouring a connection and a dependency. Lady Carbery described the nature of inter-class relations on her family estates. She remembered her maternal grandmother's relationship with the poor in Berkshire:

She is the lady who attends to the people in its villages: to their souls if she misses them from church, to their bodies if ill...and if poor, as most of them are, with flannel and calico from the Poor Persons' cupboard.

Almost every afternoon she drives to visit the sick, with cans, bottles and bundles. The footman knocks on the door and inquires if the person is at home. Then Grandmama enters the cottage, bringing a waft of cheerfulness with her. She settles down for a lively chat before reading the Bible, the chapter she has chosen beforehand to suit each person...Next they expect Grandmama to pray...Then Grandmama takes out her pocket-book and writes what chapter she read and what is needed, such as sheets, jelly, or castor-oil, and how the person seems. In x (tremis) means warn the Parson.²³²

Mary emulated the actions of her grandmother when she grew up. She was encouraged to become active in philanthropy when she was widowed, as a way of occupying herself.²³³ She played an active part in her tenants' lives, and like her grandmother did not require an invitation to 'make a sick call', with some food.²³⁴ She

²²⁸ Anne Corrigan to Lady Castletown, November 12, 1909, NLI/MS/34,166/7.

²²⁹ Anne Corrigan to Lady Castletown, Correspondence November 9 to December 7 1909, NLI/MS/34,166/7.

²³⁰ Lady Castletown to Lord Castletown, 2 May 1890, NLI/MS/34,168/5.

²³¹ Everett, *Bricks and flowers*, p. 160; E. Grehan, 'Charity given to workmen', IE/BL/EP/G/307.

²³² Lady Carbery, *Happy world*, p. 48.

²³³ Sandford (ed.), *West Cork Journal*, p. 20.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

housed the local beggar, tried to trace emigrant children in America, gave loans in times of need, and even called the police in cases of domestic abuse.²³⁵ She refused to become a proselytiser, and would not attempt to convert a Roman Catholic, whatever disdain she felt for that religion.²³⁶ She enjoyed meeting and observing the labouring class. She wanted their adoration and love, and even went so far as to take lessons in Irish language and history from a small farmer, writing 'If Queen Victoria can learn Hindustani I can learn Irish'.²³⁷ She had a clear sense of the mutually beneficial nature of her estate charity 'These poor people, I must turn and try to help them. I am sure it [giving of charity] would also help me.'²³⁸ She stressed the positive nature of their relationship, the power she held in their lives, and the near reverence with which they treated her.²³⁹ Mary's grandson observed that she was someone who loved to be loved.²⁴⁰ She removed herself from the business side of the estate so she could foster the image of herself as a mother figure to 'her people'.²⁴¹ When Elizabeth Leigh died, her brother-in-law tried to offer comfort to her bereaved mother by describing the grief and respect shown by the local tenantry.²⁴²

It is significant that traditional charitable activity which was so personal, and required a generous donor, and a grateful recipient, continued on these estates just as the landed class was losing its political power in Ireland. These women were doing all they could, perhaps subconsciously, to preserve their family's privileged position on their own estates. Such women did not deem their traditional estate based-charity as in any way remarkable. It was not discussed their letters, and it is often only in dedicated account books that the extent of female estate charity becomes clear. Reading Esther Grehan's diary, one would have no idea of the carts of coal and blankets she had delivered every

²³⁵ Ibid., pp. 28-31.

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 99.

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 31.

²³⁸ Ibid., p. 77.

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 57,73,117.

²⁴⁰ 'Epilogue', Sandford (ed.), *West Cork Journal*, p. 135.

²⁴¹ Sandford (ed), *West Cork Journal*, p. 73.

²⁴² E. Leigh to Countess Bantry, 5 Oct. 1880, IE/BL/EP/B/2411.

year, and the way she responded to harsh winters by handing out extra supplies.²⁴³ It is likely that charity was carried out simply because it was another part of the landed woman's role, like gardening or superintending the household staff. It was a practice which was passed down the female line, so that each generation accepted it as normal practice. These women's charitable assistance was, nonetheless, an important cog in the existing local relief system, and crucial to the image of the family locally. In her memoir *Afterthoughts*, Frances Greville, Lady Warwick summarised the nature of interclass relations on her estate, where the family doled out charity and enjoyed fealty from the poor: 'We paid in cash and took in kind.'²⁴⁴

Through their charitable activity, landed women could exercise a degree of control over the people in the area: Lady Monteagle, Lady Inchiquin and Lady Castletown all paid the salary of the local teacher. Lady Monteagle also paid fees for boys on the estate to attend the Munster Agricultural and Dairy School or Royal Irish Constabulary training. Viscountess Doneraile kept a file entitled 'Walsh girl papers about emigrating', which included pamphlets on the benefits of living in New Zealand, and correspondence with various contacts to find a girl a position as a housemaid or nurse once she got there.²⁴⁵ Another way in which landed women helped and controlled those living on the family estates was by setting up savings clubs; where members saved money over the course of the year, and were given a bonus at the end. How this money was spent (usually on clothing) could be controlled by the club, and so its owner. The Marchioness of Ormonde ran a particularly professional one on her Kilkenny and Tipperary estates during the 1880s.²⁴⁶ Clothing clubs were an extension of traditional estate-charity and members were known to the organiser.

²⁴³ 'Charity given to Workmen', notebook, IE/BL/EP/G/307.

²⁴⁴ F. E. Greville, Countess of Warwick, quoted in Gerard, 'Lady Bountiful' pp. 183-210.

²⁴⁵ NLI/MS/34,135/11.

²⁴⁶ Account book of the Marchioness of Ormonde's Clothing Club 1882- 1887, NLI/MS/23,825.

Lady Castletown ran such a club on her Co. Cork estate, and each member was listed by name or a nickname such as 'Blind Reardon'.²⁴⁷ She went further than simply recording the amount saved by club members; she also noted what they bought, down to the number of yards of material. The Doneraile Club gave its members 2s. 6d. to add to their personal savings.²⁴⁸ Members also received gifts of tea or clothes at Christmas. Lady Castletown did not penalise members for failing to reach a set target; she gave the bonus to all savers whether they reached 19s. 3d. as Mrs Lynch did in 1892, or 13s. as John Lane did in 1890. She even gave extra money to Mrs Lynch in 1897 when she only managed to save 3s 8d.²⁴⁹ Lady Monteagle's accounts record her giving a bounty of £13.19s.2d. to a clothing club in 1868, so presumably she patronised a similar club, for which records do not survive.²⁵⁰

In Blarney, the Misses Colthurst and Miss Breen set up the Blarney Savings Club in 1881, which gave members five per cent interest and allowed them to withdraw money at the year's end to spend as they wished.²⁵¹ It was organised in an ad hoc manner. Instead of specially printed ledgers, the Blarney Club used an old account book for its records. The club never exceeded twenty members, and only appears to have run for one year. Members were required to 'bring their savings on Monday at 2 o' clock, to the Blarney reading room' and lost any accrued interest if they withdrew their savings before the end of the year.²⁵² Perhaps the short life of the Blarney Savings Club was a sign of disintegrating relations on the Colthurst estate, which was the site of some violent conflict during the Land War.²⁵³

²⁴⁷ Account book of Doneraile Clothing Club, 1888-1897, NLI/MS/34,135/12.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Octavius Newry Knox, Account book detailing Lady Monteagle's expenditure on charity, 1867-1879, P 14 39.

²⁵¹ Account book of the Blarney Savings Club, U196A.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ See above, p. 64.

Estate charity was part of the landed woman's role as she saw it, but her sense of duty did not necessarily extend to people living on all land owned by their families. The fact that Anne Corrigan lived 'far away' from Lady Castletown was not in her favour, as Castletown and other women preferred to give assistance to those known to them who lived in the vicinity of their family seat. Those living on property in another part of the country could not expect to be given much attention by the female family members when they were dispensing charity. The Marchioness of Ormonde who ran a clothing club on both her Kilkenny and Tipperary estates was the exception, but the women in this study appear to have felt bound to assist only those who lived on the home estate, and preferably those known by name.²⁵⁴ Lady Castletown, for example, inherited two estates (one at Doneraile, Co. Cork – her childhood home – and one in Co. Waterford), and lived part of the year on her husband's Co. Laois estate. Anne Corrigan wrote that she was 'always helping the poor in the neighbourhood of your residence,'²⁵⁵ but her main charitable focus was certainly on the Doneraile area, where she organised a clothing club, a district nursing association, and bought new bells for the church.²⁵⁶ Lady Castletown thought of Doneraile as her home, and her estate. While all estates delivered income to the landed woman and her family, it was on the home estate that they needed the illusion at least of happy relationships with their tenants and labourers. The main entrances to Doneraile Court are found just outside the village of Doneraile and there is one entrance, almost within view of the house, which opens onto the main street (fig. 16). These villagers were, therefore, seen on a daily basis, by both the family and their guests, so it was important to maintain positive relations. Lady Carbery never alluded to the poor who lived on her family's Co. Limerick or Queen's County lands, but only cared for the 'neighbours', who she could visit in a day's ride. Through their inter-class entertaining and charity these

²⁵⁴ 'Charity given to workmen', BL/EP/G/307; Account book, 1867-1879, P 14 39.

²⁵⁵ A. Corrigan to Lady Castletown, 12 Nov. 1909, NLI/MS/34,166/7.

²⁵⁶ Doneraile Clothing Club Account book, NLI/MS/34,135/12; John Taylor & co. to Lady Castletown March 1890, NLI/MS/34,166/8. 'Late Lady Castletown', *Cork Examiner*, 15 Mar. 1927.

wives of landlords really became ‘the principal ladies of their respective neighbourhoods’.²⁵⁷

The roles of women who were not wives

So far, the focus has primarily been on married women, as they played the central role of wife within the home, but daughters, sisters and aunts also occupied this space. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the ‘surplus woman’ was deemed problematic in didactic literature.²⁵⁸ While such writers were primarily concerned with the women of the middle classes, who were refusing to take their pre-ordained position as wife and mother, it is worth analysing the roles available to the single women of this class. These women have remained invisible to history, unless, like Charlotte Grace O’Brien or Edith Somerville, they gained a public profession. The public activities of women will be discussed in Chapter Two, but we will now focus on the home life of daughters, sisters, aunts and widowed mothers.

Oftentimes, widows had a change of role when their husband died, or when the heir married.²⁵⁹ This sample shows that a husband’s death could have various impacts on his widow’s living arrangements. The twice widowed Lady Carbery learned as a child that a widow must make way for her son’s wife:

“Mama, I am going to be married!” These are words which dowagers are trained to expect. They are taught to answer, “This is good news my darling boy! I hope she is a nice, good girl and that you will be very happy together.” They are trained in this way when they marry eldest sons. It is their lot. They must not show their feelings nor let anyone pity them for having to leave their homes.²⁶⁰

Lady Carbery’s widowed maternal grandmother moved to London with her unmarried daughter, while her paternal grandmother preferred to move to ‘a large corner house’ in

²⁵⁷ Anon. *Manners and rules*, p. 166.

²⁵⁸ W. Greg, *Why are women redundant?* (London, 1869).

²⁵⁹ Jalland, *Death in the Victorian family*, p. 231.

²⁶⁰ Carbery, *Happy world*, p. 99.

the resort town of St. Leonards, where the rent was paid by her son.²⁶¹ When Ethel, Lady Inchiquin and her husband moved to Dromoland in 1900, the new Dowager Inchiquin and her remaining single children had to find a new primary residence, in this case a Chelsea townhouse.²⁶² Lady Carbery's grandmother was stoical in her resignation, but when Mary's own son sold Castlefreke she was heartbroken. For some women, however, this new life stage offered exciting freedom. The unhappily married Catherine Herbert who was born in England, for example, had always hated her marital home in Killarney, which had no indoor toilet. In widowhood, her husband's family history no longer dictated her residence, and she moved to a terraced house in Dublin where she had ready access to the High Church practices which she had sorely missed during her marriage.²⁶³

The childless Olive, Lady Ardilaun did not have to make way for the heir, and widowhood saw the continuation of her hosting and philanthropic duties. She carried out these activities as a tribute to her late husband, and to her own position. However, her marital home to the south of Dublin became unbearable, due to the faulty heating system and excessive damp. Her cousin, Katherine Everett wrote:

Olive hated the place in winter. I can see her now in my mind, a tall, slight, black figure, flitting across that cavernous hall... St. Anne's may have been a good setting for very large formal parties, but for my cousin it was more like living in a mausoleum than in a home.

She had Katherine redesign her two houses on St Stephen's Green into a 'perfect small town house' where she was much happier.²⁶⁴ When Ethel, Lady Inchiquin's husband died, outside this time period, she rented Dromoland Castle for herself and her unmarried

²⁶¹ St Leonards is a sea-side town beside Hastings on England's south-east coast. Carbery, *Happy world*, p. 99, 35.

²⁶² 'Marriage Of Chevalier Marconi and the Hon. Beatrice O'Brien' in *Irish Times*, 17 Mar., 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times (1859-2011) and The Weekly Irish Times (1876-1958), <http://0-search.proquest.com/library.ucc.ie/hnpirishtimes/docview/518851076/14083025E431605472/1?accountid=14504> accessed on 14 Sept. 2013.

²⁶³ Everett, *Bricks*, pp. 24, 91.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

daughters from her son, while he continued to live in London, avoiding the stresses and duties of landlord life in the new Irish State.²⁶⁵

When young unmarried women completed their education and were deemed grown up,²⁶⁶ they generally lived in their father's house as an apprentice to their mother. Single women were indoctrinated into the belief system of the class, and they could be very loyal to the needs of their families. Edith Somerville was angry with her brother, the heir, for the lack of care he showed towards the family estate. It was thanks to her, and her knowledge of farming, that the Somerville family were able to survive as members of the landed elite for so long.²⁶⁷ Such loyalty and dedication to the family welfare was not unique. For the single Charlotte Grace O'Brien, her deepest affection was for her childhood home. One of her published collections of poems was entitled *Cahirmoyle- or the old home*.²⁶⁸ Charlotte described the family estate as 'sacred to us [her brothers and sisters] above all we see'.²⁶⁹ The importance of the place, both inside and outside, is indicated in the titles of the poems in this collection.²⁷⁰ The surrounding lands were eulogised in 'The Old Garden', 'The Way to Church', and 'The Farm'.²⁷¹ She closed 'The Old Garden' with the lines; 'They are gone [the hollyhock], and so are we, but from my heart/Those lovely old world scenes will ne'er depart'.²⁷² When she wrote these poems she could no longer call Cahirmoyle home, but its importance was etched in her mind.

²⁶⁵ Ethel, Lady Inchiquin, journal, NLI/MS/14,742.

²⁶⁶ 'Family Journal', 11th Number, September 1903, IE/BL/EP/G/1495.

²⁶⁷ Lewis, Somerville, e.g. pp. 267-8.

²⁶⁸ S. Gwynn, 'Introductory memoir' in S. Gwynn (ed.), *Charlotte Grace O'Brien*, pp. 5, 138.

²⁶⁹ Charlotte Grace O'Brien, *Cahirmoyle*, reproduced in Gwynn (ed.), *Charlotte Grace O'Brien*, p. 139.

²⁷⁰ She remembered 'That dear old brown house with its ivied keep' in 'The House', and her favourite rooms in 'The Nursery', 'The Study', 'The Drawing-Room', 'The School Room' and 'The Parlour'. Charlotte Grace O'Brien, reproduced in Gwynn (ed.), *Charlotte Grace O'Brien*, pp. 140, 143- 145.

²⁷¹ Charlotte Grace O'Brien, reproduced in Gwynn (ed.), *Charlotte Grace O'Brien*, pp. 139, 148-9.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 139.

As an old woman, Christine Chichester, the unmarried sister of Esther Grehan, devoted her life to preserving her family history.²⁷³ Another single woman, for whom material survives in the Grehan collection, Frances Ellen Nugent, a cousin of Stephen Grehan, wrote the history of her extended family in 1879, but continued adding to it until 1912.²⁷⁴ Charlotte Grace O'Brien's unmarried niece, Nelly, encouraged her brother, the heir, to keep up connections with their extended family.²⁷⁵ This devotion to one's birth family is understandable when one examines the early adulthood of such women.

The family estate (or occasionally estates) was the centre of their world. The eldest Grehan sibling, May, lived as her widowed father's companion until her marriage in 1923, at the age of thirty-nine.²⁷⁶ The position of parent companion was a valid one for a single woman at the time. As Charlotte Grace O'Brien came to the end of her education, her widowed father wrote to her; 'you must give another year to tuition, after which time you must be prepared to take a position in the world as the consoler of your father,' on another occasion he wrote 'it is your duty to attend to me in case of illness, I shall hope that you will come and stay with me until I shall be re-established in health.' Charlotte was nurse and companion to her father until he died.²⁷⁷ Nelly O'Brien was much older when her father needed care, but she was in no doubt that she should leave her independent home and lifestyle in Dublin to be with him. She wrote to her brother: 'As far as I can see my best plan is to take a run over to Dublin early next month to settle my affairs & then come back here to be with Margaret [another sister] & Father.'²⁷⁸

²⁷³ Christine Chichester, correspondence re family history, IE/BL/EP/G/1455-1467.

²⁷⁴ Frances Ellen Nugent, 'Family History of Frances Ellen Nugent', 1879-1912, IE/BL/EP/G/1540.

²⁷⁵ For e.g., Ellen Lucy O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, 30 Oct. [n.d.], NLI/MS/779/3.

²⁷⁶ Stephen Grehan, diary entry, 23 Nov. 1922, IE/BL/EP/B/777.

²⁷⁷ Gwynn, 'Introductory memoir', p. 32; William Smith O'Brien to Charlotte Grace O'Brien, 10 Feb. 1864, reproduced in R. Davis and M., Davis, *The rebel in his family: selected papers of William Smith O'Brien* (Cork, 1998).

²⁷⁸ Ellen Lucy O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, 20 Mar. [n.d.], NLI/MS/36,779/2. Later, Edward would spend time with his son and daughter-in-law, Ibid.

The task of caring for parents was not, necessarily, an unwelcome one. In her romanticised memoir, Maud Gonne demonstrated that she enjoyed 'playing the wife' to her father. She was thrilled when people mistook them for a married couple, and she acted as hostess in his house, a position which would have been her mother's had she been alive.²⁷⁹ Some of the women in this sample were especially close to their fathers. Viscount Doneraile's letters to his daughter on various birthdays, which she treasured throughout her life, are affectionate, and Elizabeth Leigh and her father, the 3rd Earl Bantry, were extremely close.²⁸⁰ Before her marriage, Mary O'Brien delighted in acting as her father's companion. Mary's father, Stephen Edmond Spring-Rice, the heir to the Monteagle baronetcy, was not widowed, but with twelve children, her mother could not always leave home to be by his side. As Stephen had not yet taken up his position as landlord²⁸¹, he worked for a living, and held various government positions, which kept him in London and Cambridge for much of his life. When Mary got the opportunity to act as his companion, and so surrogate wife, she was filled with a sense of self-importance, and portrayed herself as indispensable, and so, subtly superior to her cousin, Lady Moyneux. She declined an invitation to meet saying: 'as it being Papa's first day here, he will like to have me with him.'²⁸² Later, she recorded with glee that she stayed on in London to 'look after him!' while her mother and siblings went home to Mount Trenchard.²⁸³ In her role as companion to her father, she was given a position above that of any of her sisters. Acting as a companion to one's parents was a finite occupation. Mary O'Brien was married to Edward before she lost a parent, but Charlotte Grace was only nineteen at the time of her father's

²⁷⁹ Maud Gonne McBride, *A servant of the queen*, pp. 27, 36-7.

²⁸⁰ Viscount Doneraile to Lady Castletown, RI, Lady Elizabeth Leigh to 3rd Earl Bantry, 2 Aug. 1874, IE/BL/EP/B/2440.

²⁸¹ Spring-Rice was deputy chairman of the Board of Customs. He would never come into his inheritance as he predeceased his father by nine months, dying on board a steamship on the Mediterranean. 'Monteagle', *Burke's Peerage and Baronetage*.

²⁸² Mary Spring-Rice to Lady Molyneux, 20 July 1859, NLI/MS/36,767.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 26 July 1859.

death. She was too young to live independently, so she returned to her childhood home, Cahirmoyle, to the guardianship of her eldest brother, Edward, Mary O'Brien's husband.²⁸⁴

There was a clear demarcation between married and single women's roles, and status, within the home. Some women could act as surrogate wives to brothers, fathers or uncles, but this state was rarely permanent. For those women who were never wives, or who lost their position as surrogate, there was no real role on the estate. However, their lives were not necessarily spent in an idle depression; they exerted their energies in other interests which will be discussed in the next chapter. For girls and single women who were still in their parental home, an informal apprenticeship took place for wifedom. This indoctrination is further evidence of the importance with which the role of wife was taken.

Indeed, on the cusp of the new role, some women expressed nervousness at taking on the increased responsibility, demonstrating that, as daughters, they had never held final responsibility for tasks. Even at the age of 32, Mabel Smyly was nervous of the prospect of gaining a position of authority in her marital household in 1902; 'marching round ... of a morning solemnly instructing Annie and seeing that Alice counts through her spoons and forks every week.'²⁸⁵ The practice of the heir and his wife living in a secondary seat, or travelling between rented accommodations, in the early years of their marriage, gave these women some time to ease themselves into their new duties. After their marriage in September 1863, Mary and Edward O'Brien stayed in England for a few weeks, and then travelled in Europe for six months before taking residence in his family seat of Cahirmoyle, Co. Limerick.²⁸⁶ Mary treated her mother as a confidante, and the letters written during the early days of her marriage illustrate the importance they both placed on successful servant management. Responding to a query as to how she was faring in this new role, Mary wrote:

²⁸⁴ Gwynn, 'Introductory memoir, p. 34.

²⁸⁵ Mabel O'Brien to Dermot Smyly, 1 Feb 1902, NLI/MS/36,699/3.

²⁸⁶ Mary O'Brien to Ellen Spring-Rice, 22 Sept. 1863. NLI/MS/36,758/2.

Edward is immensely amused at my housekeeping. He says I am the most thoughtful of wives; but I think he is the best of husbands because he is always pleased with what I give him for dinner! I don't think I mind ordering dinner. I felt shy the first day, but I like the cook very much. She behaves with the most edifying gravity & deference to me: but one day Edward chose to come in to the kitchen & as soon as he saw me he went into fits of laughter - & then I laughed - & then Susan laughed - & all decorum vanished for the time...I get on extremely well with all the servants. I like Stone [lady's maid] better the more I know of her.²⁸⁷

This was the essential difference between wives and daughters. Wives held authority, but daughters were only given small projects to manage. Greater respect was shown to married women, even when they were younger than single women. When Elizabeth attended the house party at the home of her sister Olive Ardilaun in 1871, she was expected to ask her mother's permission to stay longer. She wrote to her father: 'Olive & Arthur begged so much to keep me a bit longer, that Mama has consented to my going to them at St. Anne's where they are going directly, & it is nothing of a journey from Kilkenny.'²⁸⁸ Elizabeth was the eldest child and twenty-four-years-old. Her sister was twenty-two, but as a married woman, Olive, was her sister's social superior. Gertrude Foster, sister of Ethel, Lady Inchiquin, rather callously recorded the moment when their aunt, Louisa, could at last be deemed a spinster:

Aunt Louisa is quite amused with him [the dog]. It is the only thing which does amuse her as she is in the most frightfully discontented mood, & abuses poor meek Aunt Lilly day & night, & says it is quite impossible to live with her any more[sic] & she is losing[sic] her soul & intellect in living with her at the Breck!! & so on all day long! It is really terrific what people can get into, she does not know what she wants. Aunt Lila has offered her to go to Canne[sic] with the Smyths & all sorts of plans have we all suggested, but nothing is any good – So one becomes an old maid!!²⁸⁹

Louisa made the mistake of not acting meek and invisible, but rather demanding attention. Within the home, unmarried women were to remain biddable girls, no matter their age. When single women could be held in such contempt, it is not surprising that Esther Grehan wrote to her fiancé to report an episode where a married woman had asked her advice on

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Lady Elizabeth White to 3rd Earl Bantry, 19 Oct 1871, IE/BL/EP/G/2437.

²⁸⁹ Gertrude Foster to Ethel O'Brien, 21 Jan. 1896, NLI/MS/45,503.

‘some housekeeping’. To be thus treated as an equal made Esther hold her head ‘an inch higher in consequence.’²⁹⁰

Adult women, who were unmarried, might take on some of the roles of a wife for an unmarried or widowed brother. This appears to have been less palatable than acting as their father’s companion. In 1902, Nelly O’Brien was keeping house for her brother, Dermot, who had bought a town house in Dublin. At this stage, brother and sister were thirty-seven and thirty-eight, and neither had married. They were quite close, with a shared interest in art, though he claimed to prefer his married sister Mary Cane.²⁹¹ Nelly had hoped that Dermot would move to Dublin so that they could spend more time together, and looked for suitable houses for him.²⁹² No letters from Nelly survive during the period while they lived together, but Dermot’s correspondence with his fiancée suggests that he was aware that, for Nelly, the arrangement was not working out so well. She worked hard to prepare the place for his new wife, who was also her friend; she unpacked his belongings and arranged the garden.²⁹³ In a letter to his fiancée he revealed that he did not treat Nelly with the respect and gratitude she might deserve:

N[elly] has gone sadly off to bed saying she is a dull companion for me so I suppose that I have been behaving badly. Just my way. I really do do my best to get into her life & then go & do something beastly or catch her up on some ridiculous trifle and then a rift appears.²⁹⁴

When Dermot married, his sister moved out to make way for her new sister-in-law.

Dermot’s wife wondered vaguely ‘where Nelly will really settle down’, but it would not be with their ‘two selves at 42’.²⁹⁵ Nelly’s aunt, Charlotte Grace O’Brien, had a similar experience.

²⁹⁰ Esther Chichester to Stephen Grehan, 2 Nov. 1882, IE/BL/EP/G/676.

²⁹¹ Dermot O’Brien to Mabel O’Brien, 1 Nov. 1901, NLI/MS/36,694/1.

²⁹² Ellen Lucy O’Brien to Dermot O’Brien, 10 Nov. 1900, NLI/MS/36,779/2.

²⁹³ Dermot O’Brien to Mabel O’Brien, 2 Oct. 1901, NLI/MS/36,694/1, Mabel O’Brien to Dermot O’Brien, 24 Oct. 1901, NLI/MS/699/1.

²⁹⁴ Dermot O’Brien to Mabel O’Brien, 1 Nov. 1901, NLI/MS/36,694/2.

²⁹⁵ Mabel O’Brien to Dermot O’Brien, Feb. 1902, NLI/MS/36,699/3.

Following the death of her father, Charlotte was nervous at first of returning to live in her childhood residence, which was now the home of her brother Edward, his wife Mary, and their daughter Nelly. The landlord's wife displaced his sisters in the order of precedence in a house, even when it had been their primary residence.²⁹⁶ Mary O'Brien, however, proved to be kind and sisterly to Charlotte. She understood her fears and made her welcome. As Charlotte remembered in a poem:

Mid Sorrow, doubt and fear, I came to thee,
Nor knew thee. But thy keen-eyed sympathy
Looked down into my heart and saw where slept
Shadows of jealous love and tears unwept:
Then with thyself thou didst encompass me,
Drawing me ever nearer tenderly,
Till the full flood of thy rich loving swept
Across my heart and doubt was calmed to rest.²⁹⁷

Other poems dedicated to Mary also reflect on the closeness of their relationship.²⁹⁸ According to the memoir by Charlotte's nephew Stephen Gwynn, Charlotte was more than happy living as help-mate to her sister-in-law, and took over some of Mary's roles when she died in 1868, acting as Edward's housekeeper, and as a mother to his children.²⁹⁹ She grew to love Nelly and her siblings as though they were her own children, and was content.³⁰⁰ Once the children went to school, and Edward remarried, however, Charlotte was no longer needed in the position of surrogate wife.³⁰¹ Neither Edward nor his son Dermot were particularly kind to their sisters who took care of the household duties. Charlotte's nephew remembered that she was not a tidy person, and that Edward was quite critical of her management of the house.³⁰² Likewise, Dermot belittled his sister Nelly's efforts at the house accounts, writing disparagingly to his fiancée that 'She poor soul is not over-strong in that line, either in accuracy of tots or in systematic jotting down

²⁹⁶ *Manners and rules*, p. 50.

²⁹⁷ Charlotte Grace O'Brien, 'To Mary O'Brien—1864', reproduced in Gwynn (ed.), *Charlotte Grace O'Brien*, p. 155.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 155-7.

²⁹⁹ Edward O'Brien to Charlotte O'Brien, 11 May 1868, NLI/MS/36,750.

³⁰⁰ Gwynn (ed), pp. 35-6.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 37.

of items'.³⁰³ Just as the role of parent companion ended on the death of an aging father or mother, so too the role of house-manager for a brother came to an end when he married. Unmarried sisters then had to find a new place to live.

The living arrangements of single women and widows could be precarious. Esther Grehan's sister Christine Chichester never had a permanent home after her brother Raleigh married and took over her childhood home. She spent the remainder of her life travelling or staying with an endless round of relatives.³⁰⁴ Charlotte Grace O'Brien might have shared the same fate, but she took the independent step of building her own house, Ardanoir. In a later article, 'The making of our home', Charlotte recalled her desire to build her own house: 'no sooner did I, at twenty-one, begin to handle my own money than a vision of a cottage at Foynes, my own building and my own forming, began to hover before me.' Her friends warned her that 'fools build houses,' but she was delighted with her decision.³⁰⁵ At Ardanoir she was able to indulge her passion for gardening.³⁰⁶ Charlotte Grace O'Brien used this house both as an investment and as a place to live. She let it at various times, when she was staying or living elsewhere, but spent her last years there, dying upstairs in 1909. Her nephew described her in this house, old and now almost fully deaf, but surrounded by her beloved dogs, and happy with her garden.³⁰⁷ Perhaps it was her encroaching deafness, and so decreased chances of marriage, that encouraged her to take this step. She bequeathed the house to her unmarried niece Nelly, and so gave the latter an opportunity of having her own permanent residence, away from other relatives.³⁰⁸

³⁰³ Dermot O'Brien to Mabel O'Brien, 7 Mar. 1902, NLI/MS/36,694.

³⁰⁴ Esther Grehan, diary entry, 20 July, 1895, IE/BL/EP/G/840; Family Journal 8th Number May 1903 IE/BL/EP/G/1393; Family journal September 1903 11th Number IE/BL/EP/G/1395.

³⁰⁵ Charlotte Grace O'Brien, 'The making of our home', first published in *Irish Gardener*, reproduced in Gwynn (ed.), *Charlotte Grace O'Brien*, p. 219.

³⁰⁶ Charlotte Grace O'Brien to 'Molly' December 1883, reproduced in Gwynn (ed.) *Charlotte Grace O'Brien*, p. 92.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96-7.

³⁰⁸ Gwynn, 'Prefatory', in Gwynn (ed.), *Charlotte Grace O'Brien; selections from her writings*, p. 2.

Nelly was from a younger generation, and, had rented rooms of her own in Dublin as early as 1896, when she was thirty-two.³⁰⁹ She delighted in the rooms, and took care about arranging them as she would like. She had her own fireplace, and a studio, where she could practice her art.³¹⁰ These living arrangements were impermanent, and she had at least ten addresses around Dublin between 1910 and 1922.³¹¹ Her independent lifestyle was curtailed by her occasionally straitened financial situation – she once rented out the bedroom and ‘camped out in the studio’ – and by her prioritisation of the needs of her family. She nursed her brother when he was ill in Switzerland,³¹² and, as seen above, moved in with her brother Dermot when he needed a housekeeper.

As has been seen, Big Houses were public statements of class, power and prestige – but they were also homes. The women of this class appear to have been emotionally attached to the houses in which they lived. This attachment could be because women carried out their primary roles within these buildings, but they were also where women were born, educated, played, courted, were sick, gave birth, and died. Women spent the majority of their leisure time in their home, or the homes of relatives and friends. Home was both their workplace and their place of relaxation. Much of their leisure activities were tied to, and organised around their roles within the home. The low-key and ad-hoc home-based nature of leisure for the unmarried women of this class can be illustrated by this letter from Mary O’Brien who was still living in her childhood home. In this passage she differentiated between herself and her sisters, and their mother, who, as a wife, had less time to spare for leisure activities:

We are endeavouring to get the garden here into some sort of order[,] rather a difficult business as all of us except Mamma are totally ignorant, & she cannot of course give much time ...Aileen & Lucy are setting up a kitchen garden, beginning with a small plot of ground at present, but they intend eventually to

³⁰⁹ Ellen Lucy O’Brien to Dermot O’Brien, NLI/MS/36,779.

³¹⁰ Chapter Two p. 115.

³¹¹ A.M. Stewart (ed), *Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts index of exhibitors and their works, 1826-1979*, vol.III (Dublin, 1987), p. 26.

³¹² Ellen O’Brien to Dermot O’Brien, corr, July-Sept. 1900, NLI/MS/36,779/2.

manage the whole garden. I suppose it would be spiteful to suggest what road it is that is paved with good intentions. I have not been drawing much lately, I am going to try modelling in clay have you ever tried it? & can you give us any advice? For we are very ignorant & have no one here to teach us. I hope you won't look at my writing when you read this!! Its atrocity is really only equalled by the extreme dullness & stupidity of the matter it conveys. Que voulez vous? I don't go gallivanting about to gay watering places, as some people do – no, I stay at home & hem pocket handkerchiefs, & what can I have to write about?³¹³

Her daughter Nelly demonstrated an equal lack of purpose in her daytime activities:

I have been so good all day; was only 5 minutes late for breakfast having slept with Aunt Julia...I conducted Aunt Ma to church & back; I wrote 2 letters; I talked to visitors & suppressed the children & read for some time & now after these laudable exertions I am undergoing the consequent reaction. To begin with 'entre hours' it is very full not having a man in the house, even children don't quite compensate.³¹⁴

Around the same time, a letter from Esther Grehan to her fiancé showed a similar pattern to her life, while staying with family friends at Old Court, Doneraile, Co. Cork. She wrote that she planned to go out sketching for the afternoon, 'however as it was drizzling we did not go but passed a dismal afternoon keeping the fire warm.' She used the time to finish sewing a border she was 'working like a galley slave at', and was happy to see that it was 'really coming on'.³¹⁵ In the early twentieth century, Mary O'Brien's granddaughters were given a patch of garden to manage, as a form of leisure, and of training for their later life as wives of the landed estate owners.³¹⁶ While these women all appear to have been contented with their lot, and do not appear to have felt confined by their homes, women who did not marry had no real duties within the home, unless they were acting in the place of a wife. They had to look outside the home for their sense of duty.

Conclusion

There were few, if any, complaints of boredom from these women when they were at home. In her childhood memoir, Lady Carbery wrote 'Although I was not yet a schoolroom child, I had a busy life; each day twelve hours long, from seven to seven, and

³¹³ Mary O'Brien to Lady Molyneux, 17 Mar. 1860, NLI/MS36,767.

³¹⁴ Ellen Lucy O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, Sunday 27 Feb. n.d. [1884-8], NLI/MS/36,779/1.

³¹⁵ Esther Chichester to Stephen Grehan, 'Friday' [November 1882] IE IE/BL/EP/G/686.

³¹⁶ Mabel O'Brien, speech on behalf of Parents National Education Union (PNEU) n.d., NLI/MS/36,827.

every minute full of jobs and joys.³¹⁷ For the children, and most of the married women, of this class, home generally appears to have provided them with plenty of opportunities to occupy themselves. The role of wife allowed them to make a significant contribution to the success of their families. It was a position which was recognised and respected by their relations, and their class. Viscountess Barrington believed that an older man's readiness to remarry illustrated his 'happiness under the first regime, and ... his helplessness without a wife.'³¹⁸

These houses were also family homes, and in the main they were quite happy. All of these women received the training to become a landlord's wife. They contributed to the family's philanthropic endeavours, designed sections of the garden, or acted as hostess and manager for father or brother. This training, while not always put to its primary intended purpose, instilled in these women the self-confidence of their class. The leadership roles which they saw their mothers occupying meant that they might also go on to show leadership in a number of different spheres. Whether married or single, these women were defined by their class. They lived in a space that was both public and private. They had no apprehension then about navigating the public world, be it for leisure or for more altruistic purposes. Just as the Big Houses of Munster had both public and private roles, so did the women who occupied them.

³¹⁷ Carbery, *Happy world*, p. 43.

³¹⁸ Charlotte, Viscountess Barrington, *Through eighty years* (London, 1986), p. 133, quoted in J. Gerard, *Country house life*, p. 113.



Fig. 13: Jane, Countess of Bantry in middle age.

Source: Elizabeth White, photograph album, IE BL/EP/B/3463.



Fig. 14: Ellen, Lady Inchiquin, c. 18

Ellen Lady Inchiquin's photograph album, Inchiquin Collection, NLI/MS/14,787.



Fig. 15: Ethel, Lady Inchiquin, dressed in state robes for the coronation of King Edward VII, 9 Aug. 1902, NLI/MS/L/142.



Fig. 16: Gate opening onto the main street of Doneraile for Doneraile Court. Gate known locally as 'The Lord's Gate.' Source: <http://homepage.eircom.net/~neillod/tomos.html> accessed on 14 September 2013

Chapter 2: World and Leisure

Introduction

From outside, people with hooks and lines catch me to do things. Tomorrow I have to open a bazaar at Skibbereen; on Thursday there are two committees in Cork. Doty [cousin-in-law, the Countess of Bandon] is an active caster-of-nets. She entangles me in hateful committees where women talk and talk, mostly to one another, and waste time over matters which could be settled in ten minutes by two sensible people. Or by one! I observe that women behave better when there are men on the committee but even then there is no briskness.

Apart from these entanglements there are others. I am trapped by Sense of Duty, that dull dogger of steps; I am held by the Call of Misery from far and near.³¹⁹

As we have seen, Lady Carbery delighted in her home and the local environment. Equally, though perhaps she was not as quick to admit it, she found pleasure in public pursuits. In regard to being caught with 'hooks and lines' she was representative of her class. The hooks which caught such women were philanthropic, political, literary or artistic endeavours; and the lines were their passion for travel, sport or fashion. The image of the 'angel of the house', tied to domestic duties, does not fit comfortably with the surviving writings of the women of this class. While women exercised empowering and fulfilling duties within the home, the outside world offered them many opportunities for further influence and diversion. There were considerable political and social constraints on women during the period – they could not vote, and they were excluded from tertiary education and the professions for much of the period in question, but some of these limitations were counteracted by the privileges associated with membership of the landed elite, even during the early twentieth century. These women, imbued with the confidence and privilege of their class, travelled widely, wrote books for publication, studied art, joined campaigns, and were physically active. Despite the constraints on their sex, these women were dynamic actors in the public world, and avid consumers of the pleasures this world had to offer. By

³¹⁹ Sandford (ed.), *West Cork Journal*, p. 26-7.

remaining loyal to their families, and their class, these women did not feel that they were constrained in their interaction with the wider world.

The physical world

Physical activity

Women in the landed class in Munster were not deprived of physical activity.

Indeed one even termed the condition of 'nerves' as foolish.³²⁰ When Mary O'Brien was forced to take bed rest for a badly inflamed knee, her husband feared that 'confinement to the home will tell on her general health.'³²¹ Before her marriage to Stephen Grehan, Esther recorded taking her 'constitutional' walk for the benefit of her health.³²² Those who were ill were encouraged to be as active as possible. Lady Leigh, the daughter of the 3rd Earl Bantry, suffered from rheumatism from an early age. Her parents brought her to Carlsbad in modern-day Czech Republic, in the hope of improving her health. The measures they took involved excursions to art galleries, churches and long walks in the countryside. Thus, the lives of landed women in Munster, when healthy, were not as constricted as might be thought and physical health and well-being were nurtured by their sporting activities.

Sport

Throughout these decades, the social calendar of the landed class was ordered by the various sporting seasons. In his pioneering work on sport in Co. Westmeath, Tom Hunt has examined the activity of both men and women during the period 1850-1905, and has found that

There is evidence from Westmeath that women participated in at least fourteen different sports, including individual sports such as archery, athletics, tennis,

³²⁰ Carbery, *Happy world*, p. 18. See B. Ehrenreich and D. English, *For her own good*, p. 150 and J. Schneid Lewis, *In the family way*, pp. 124-5 for conflicting conclusions on the state of women's health according to the sources used.

³²¹ Edward O'Brien to Charlotte Grace O'Brien, 30, Jan. 1865, NLI/MS/36,750.

³²² Esther Chichester to Stephen Grehan, 18 October 1882, BL/EP/G/664.

badminton, table-tennis, golf, croquet, cycling; field sports, such as hunting, fishing and shooting, and team sports such as hockey, and as a novelty event, cricket.³²³

He has disputed earlier claims that women's involvement in sport required them to 'show restraint, be refined and respectable, and confirm at all times the ladylike modes of behaviour prescribed for them.'³²⁴ He has convincingly demonstrated that women were active and competitive participants in various sports, and found that 'the behaviour of upper- and middle-class Victorian and Edwardian women, and the reactions of men towards them did not always conform to what was the desired ideal,' and that 'the acceptance of the separate spheres lifestyle thesis was not universal.'³²⁵ This conclusion does not go quite far enough, however. To be active in sport did not require a woman of this class to defy orthodoxy; these women felt no conflict between propriety and their active participation in sport. This is especially obvious in the case of hunting.

Hunting was a passion for many members of the landed class, and both men and women participated. Elizabeth, Countess Fingall noted that for the hunting obsessed gentry of County Meath there was little to do during the summer but wait for it to be winter, when they could hunt again.³²⁶ Fingall recounted how her husband had given her no option but to join the fun, by totally ignoring her fears.³²⁷ Other women participated more enthusiastically. Violet Martin, the writer, rode horses astride from an early age, and was fearless in the saddle. Her cousin and writing partner, Edith Somerville, progressed to become the first female Master of Hounds in 1903, though she continued to ride side-saddle all her life, despite the damage the practice did to her right leg.³²⁸ She thought it was

³²³ T. Hunt, *Sport and society in Victorian Ireland: the case of Westmeath* (Cork, 2007), p. 251.

³²⁴ Jennifer A. Hargreaves. 'Playing like gentlemen while behaving like ladies' *British Journal of Sports Studies* vol.2, no.1, 1985, p. 43.

³²⁵ Hunt, *Sport and society*, p. 112.

³²⁶ P. Hinkson, *Seventy years young: memories of Elizabeth, Countess of Fingall* (first published London, 1937; repr, Dublin 1992), p. 98.

³²⁷ *Ibid.* p97.

³²⁸ Gifford Lewis, *Edith Somerville: a biography* (Dublin, 2005), pp. 27, 219; riding side-saddle damaged her leg (p. 393).

unladylike to blow the hunting horn which was her duty as MFH, so she relayed commands to her huntsman with a whistle, and so retained her vision of propriety.³²⁹

The Empress Elisabeth of Austria, one of the leading huntswomen of the day, famously travelled to Ireland to ride with the Ward Union and Meath hunts for a number of seasons after 1876.³³⁰ The author of *Manners and Rules*, a successful etiquette manual, believed that 'there is no arena better fitted to display good riding on the part of women than the hunting field, and no better opportunity for the practice of this delightful accomplishment and for its thorough enjoyment.'³³¹ Women regularly participated in hunting from the 1860s, and by 'the 1905-6 hunting season women formed approximately one-third of the hunting field' in Co. Westmeath. They had been involved in the administrative duties of the hunt from the 1890s.³³² The leading women on the Westmeath hunting scene were not shy of the challenges and dangers of the sport, and were lauded in the press for their plucky riding and obvious stamina.³³³ The activity did not impact on a woman's femininity and the female riding habit was deemed to be one of the most alluring outfits in any woman's wardrobe. Vanity was, perhaps, the only reason why Countess Fingall consented to ride at all. She fondly remembered how she looked in her riding habit which 'gave away' and 'showed off' her figure, and her shiny hat with its 'becoming...little curly brim'.³³⁴ Lady Carbery enjoyed the hunt greatly as teenager; she enjoyed the

³²⁹ Ibid., caption to fig. 25, after p. 310.

³³⁰ Bowen, *Irish hunting*, p. 179; R.T. Matthews and P. Mellini, in 'Vanity Fair' (London and Berkeley, 1981), pp. 47-8, ref. in L.P. Curtis Jr., 'Stopping the hunt 1881-1882: an aspect of the Irish Land War.' In C.H.E. Philpin (ed), *Nationalism and popular protest in Ireland*, ([1987] Cambridge, 2002), pp. 349-402: 354. See also Bence-Jones *Twilight*, pp. 1-2; T. Canavan, "'Erin cordially welcomes the Empress": Elizabeth of Austria-Hungary in Ireland, 1879 and 1880', *History Ireland*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (May/June 2011).

³³¹ Anon., *Manners and rules*, p. 220.

³³² Hunt, *Sport and society*, p. 17-18, See also Curtis, 'Stopping the hunt' p. 354, note 13 where he lists some of the leading huntswomen in Ireland, and states: 'In England, the presence of women in the field became noticeable after the 1850s.'

³³³ Hunt, *Sport and society*, p. 17-18.

³³⁴ *Seventy years young*, p. 93-4.

admiration she received as she sat wearing her new hat and habit on her 'beautiful mare called Flirt'.³³⁵

L.P Curtis, Jnr has suggested that hunting was the preserve of the gentry, with just a few aristocratic enthusiasts. In this sample, hunting was enjoyed by both titled and untitled families. The two greatest enthusiasts, Esther Grehan and Lady Castletown, both lived in North Cork, where the tradition of hunting was strong, but in nearby Limerick, another stronghold of the sport, the untitled O'Briens and Barons Monteagle expressed no interest whatsoever. For the Grehan women and their maternal relations, hunting was central to their lives, and the season was eagerly awaited each year.³³⁶ Esther lived in hunting circles. Her father had been Master of Hounds, and her husband was heavily involved in the Duhallow hunt.³³⁷ She was confident enough in her own judgement to assess a horse for herself.³³⁸ Some of her longest diary entries record the latest hunt in great detail; how fresh her horse was, and how it behaved, how close to the action she and Stephen were at the finish.³³⁹ Esther and her husband were eager that their daughters would join the hunt, presumably thinking that it would be physically and mentally beneficial to them as they grew up. Stephen bought a pony for the children, and both parents enjoyed teaching the girls to ride.³⁴⁰ Competitiveness was encouraged, and the girls competed in donkey races on the beach in Tramore.³⁴¹ The sense of occasion was palpable when the two eldest, May (11) and Magda (10), dressed in their new riding habits and

³³⁵ Carbery, *Happy world*, p. 194.

³³⁶ May Grehan, Family Journal, no. 11, September 1903, BL/EP/G/1395.

³³⁷ 'Duhallow Hunt Club committee minutes' Feb. 1896, IE/BL/EP/G/814, 'Subscription lists for the Duhallow Hunt Club and Races', 1887-1907, BL/EP/G/815-19.

³³⁸ Esther Grehan, diary entry, 22 Jan. 1894. IE/BL/EP/G/839.

³³⁹ Ibid., 24 Jan., 9,10 March, 29 Oct., 6, 30 Nov.

³⁴⁰ For e.g. Ibid., 27 July, 17, 20 Sept. 1894, IE/BL/EP/G 839;also 2, 13 Jan., 5 Aug., 16 Sept., 3 Dec., 1895, IE/BL/EP/G/840.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 27 July 1895.

buttonholes, attended their first meet.³⁴² Even on her first hunt, May Grehan was encouraged to exhibit bravery by her parents:

[S]he had several jumps[;] the pony pulled her sometimes & she was frightened particularly when she saw Lady Listowel fall at a fence – However Stephen cheered her on & she jumped it alright.³⁴³

The sport made heavy physical demands on enthusiasts, and it was not for everyone. It has been estimated that female riders made up just ten per cent of the field in English hunts.³⁴⁴ *Manners and Rules* provided three reasons why only a minority of women hunted. Firstly, because it was a dangerous sport:

Ladies do not attempt to hunt unless their skill as good horsewomen is beyond all question. Their husbands, their fathers, their brothers would not allow them to jeopardise their lives, unless their riding and experience, their courage, their nerve, and their instruction justified the attempt.³⁴⁵

Parents and husbands who were wary of inexperienced women hunting were not being irrationally cautious. One literally risked one's life when out hunting, and injuries were unavoidable.³⁴⁶ There was a death rate of about one hunter per decade in Co. Westmeath, during the second half of the nineteenth century.³⁴⁷ It was made even more challenging for the side-saddle rider, who needed exceptional balance and skill to stay on board.³⁴⁸ Lady Castletown, a competent horsewoman from a leading hunting family,³⁴⁹ received a life-threatening injury when her horse bolted, and she was hit in the head by a low-growing

³⁴² Ibid, 30 Nov. 1895.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Curtis, 'Stopping the hunt'. p. 354.

³⁴⁵ *Manners and rules*, pp. 219-20.

³⁴⁶ Esther dislocated her shoulder in a fall, see Esther Grehan, diary entry 19 Jan 1889, IE/BL/EP/G/837, and her aunt strained a muscle and had to walk home by herself. Esther Grehan, diary entry, 18 Jan. 1896, IE/BL/EP/G/841.

³⁴⁷ It would appear that none of these were women. Hunt, *Sport and society*, p. 18.

³⁴⁸ This point was also observed by Hunt: 'The requirement that women ride side saddle increased the demands for dexterity and equestrian skills and added to the hazardous nature of the activity.' p. 18.

³⁴⁹ Her father had been Master of Hounds for the Duhallow Hunt before he died. Perhaps counterintuitive for a man devoted to foxhunting, he kept a pet fox. The joke was very much on the Viscount though, as he died from rabies contracted when his pet bit him. Bence-Jones, *Twilight*, p. 68.

bough.³⁵⁰ Magda Grehan had a serious accident and ‘was thrown from her horse while riding near Clonmeen and remained unconscious for 15 days’ in 1915.³⁵¹ Esther Grehan acknowledged the potential danger by choosing not to hunt while pregnant.³⁵² Despite the fact that there was a good deal of risk, this activity was enjoyed by eminently respectable women. Fear was something to be ashamed of, and unless an injury was serious no fuss was made. Esther Grehan thought nothing of it when ‘May pulled the pony back on the top of a bank and he fell with her into the Dyke on the offside so she was not at all hurt.’³⁵³ It was by making such mistakes that May would become a better rider. Men were not smotheringly protective; they encouraged their wives and daughters to face their fears.

The second obstacle suggested by the manual was the expense incurred, and while many women might possess a perfectly good horse for daily rides, ‘very few gentlemen of moderate means can afford to keep hunters for the ladies of their family as well as themselves.’³⁵⁴ Esther Grehan was aware of the expense of a hunter before she was married, and warned her fiancé not to spend too much on other gifts for her, as she expected a new horse once they were married.³⁵⁵ The cost of hunting was not limited to buying and feeding a horse, there were hunt subscriptions to be paid. Lady Castletown objected when the Kildare hunt tried to deal with this financial pressure by extending the charges to female riders.³⁵⁶

The third consideration listed by *Manners and Rules* for unaccompanied women attending the hunt was the opportunity that ‘the long ride home in the November and December twilight’ gave for flirting with men who might not meet with their parents’

³⁵⁰ Letters, telegrams, newspaper cuttings, from 10 May 1899, R5.

³⁵¹ Stephen Grehan, diary entry, 30 March, 1915. BL EP G 769. See also Esther Grehan, diary entry, 1 Dec. 1894, BL/EP/G/839.

³⁵² Esther Grehan, diary entry 24 March 1894, IE/BL/EP/G/839, Esther Grehan diary entry, Nov.-December 1895. IE/BL/EP/G/840.

³⁵³ Esther Grehan, diary entry, 3 Jan. 1895, IE/BL/EP/G/840.

³⁵⁴ Anon., *Manners and rules*, p. 219.

³⁵⁵ Esther Chichester to Stephen Grehan, 27 Nov, 1882, IE/BL/EP/G/688.

³⁵⁶ Lady Castletown’s scrapbook, NLI/MS/3079.

approval.³⁵⁷ This final issue was given consideration by the families in this study. Esther Grehan, shortly before her marriage, complained that she would not be permitted to meet her fiancé at the next hunt, because she had no chaperone to accompany her.³⁵⁸ Lady Castletown enjoyed the social side of the sport. In her exceptionally large scrap book, she pasted a handwritten and illustrated poem which demonstrated that clandestine love affairs on the hunting field were perceived as a possibility. 'A Foggy Flirtation' (Fig.28) dated January 22nd 1889 described 'a youth and a matron suspiciously placed...with his arm encircling the motherly waist.' Another cynical poem pasted into the book encouraged the single women of Kildare to 'see the way to promotion on every side,' as there were soldiers from numerous barracks riding with the hunt.³⁵⁹

There was a fourth, peculiarly Irish, challenge to hunting. The practice of 'stopping the hunt' was used as a form of agrarian protest from 1880. Dogs were poisoned, foxes were killed and hung from trees, and the hunting fraternity could be pelted with stones and threatened with pitchforks.³⁶⁰ The practice soured relationships between some landlords and their tenants.³⁶¹ Not only were Irish women hunters faced with the intrinsic dangers of fast-paced horse-riding, they were also potentially exposed to 'rough' behaviour. The practice peaked during the 1880-1 season, when all but two or three hunts were forced to 'suspend hunting for a least a few weeks, and by March 1882 at least five hunt committees had decided to break up their establishments.'³⁶² There are no surviving records of these disturbances written by women in this sample. The earliest surviving batch of letters written by Esther Grehan begin in autumn 1882. She was not overly perturbed by the possibility of violence; she was only bothered that she would not be able to meet her

³⁵⁷ Anon., *Manners and rules*, p. 220.

³⁵⁸ Esther Chichester to Stephen Grehan, 12, 15 Nov 1882, IE/BL/EP/G/680, IE/BL/EP/G/683.

³⁵⁹ 'A foggy flirtation', 22 Jan 1889, and 'Kupenball', n.d., Lady Castletown's scrapbook, NLI/MS/3079.

³⁶⁰ L.P. Curtis, 'Stopping the hunt', p. 356, 367, 372-373.

³⁶¹ Ibid, p. 367.

³⁶² Ibid., pp. 357, 388.

fiancé. She had no one to drive her 'since the row at Duhallow, [as] nothing would induce Mrs Murrogh [with whom Esther was staying] to go to a meet.' All she could do was wait for a meet that was within walking distance, or hope someone would drive her.³⁶³ She obviously had no fear of walking through potentially hostile countryside to watch the meet.

Hunting was an activity which women of this class could choose to take part in, but this choice was heavily influenced by the level of involvement of their fathers and husbands. No married woman, in this study, hunted if her husband had no interest in the activity. Some wives of hunting enthusiasts rode to meets, while others drove and watched from the road, as hunting was also treated as a spectator sport.³⁶⁴ Family approval was important, but not essential to a woman's involvement. Charles Raleigh Chichester, the brother of Esther Grehan, was jokingly chastising of her love of the sport, and wrote to Stephen in 1897, 'glad to hear that one hunter is disabled. Hope another will meet with same fate. Then perhaps, Esther will stay quiet.'³⁶⁵ Perhaps with encouragement from her husband, and his financial backing, she was a keen hunter, and went out as much as twice a week on her own horse. So while the number of avid hunting women was relatively small, they were accepted by both the non-hunting fraternity, and their male hunting comrades. They were not curtailed by age, or marital status, and Constance and Amy Chichester (aunts of Esther Grehan), and Edith Somerville are examples of unmarried women who rode to hounds well into middle-age and beyond.³⁶⁶

Hunting was just one of the sporting activities available to women, and while it was the sport traditionally associated with the landed gentry, they were also open to new recreational inventions. One sport which captured the imagination of all classes was

³⁶³ Esther Chichester to Stephen Grehan, 14th Nov 1882, IE/BL/EP/G/682 and 17 Nov. 82, IE/BL/EP/G/685.

³⁶⁴ Canavan, 'Erin cordially welcomes the Empress'.

³⁶⁵ Charles Raleigh Chichester to Stephen Grehan, 25 Mar. 1897, IE/BL/EP/G/711.

³⁶⁶ Esther Grehan, diary entry 18 Jan. 1896, IE/BL/EP/G/841.

cycling, which really took off for women around 1895.³⁶⁷ What was once deemed as unfeminine, and a threat to the natural order, was now perceived as being particularly healthy for women, and it was reported in 1896 that 'in every part of the country, ladies can be seen pedalling merrily along, sometimes alone but more often with a party of friends.'³⁶⁸

Perhaps it was these health claims that encouraged Esther Grehan to take up the activity. Esther first mentioned cycling in her diary when her husband, aunt and friend went for a ten kilometre cycle in January 1897.³⁶⁹ It was perhaps a sign of their inexperience that 'Stephen and Amy took a toss'.³⁷⁰ Esther took up the hobby in the summer of that year. When she first started in June she 'thought it was hopeless,' but continued to practice 'on the children's lawn', and in August they bought a bike for the children.³⁷¹ In her, and her family's eyes, cycling was most certainly a respectable pursuit, and one which they took to with gusto during their time in France that summer.³⁷²

The Grehan family provide the richest material on female participation in sport. The Grehan/Chichester women participated in an exhaustive list of sports, to rival the entire county of Westmeath, including: tobogganing, ice-skating, cycling, hockey, fishing, cricket, baseball, swimming, and, of course, hunting.³⁷³ There was no set standard for sporting involvement; it appears to have been down to personal preference. Some women, such as Lady Leigh, never mentioned anything more energetic than hiking in her surviving writings. Most women in the study record activity in no more than one or two sports, such as Ethel, Lady Inchiquin's otter hunting before her marriage, and her bathing afterwards,

³⁶⁷ Brian Griffin, *Cycling in Victorian Ireland* (Dublin, 2006), pp. 103, 116-7.

³⁶⁸ See *Weekly Irish Times* and other publications quoted and referenced in *ibid.*, p. 189-140. *The Wheelwoman* 18 July 1896, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 118.

³⁶⁹ The distance was calculated by the author using today's road network, so is only an approximation.

³⁷⁰ Esther Grehan, diary entry, 18 January 1897, IE/BL/EP/G/842.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 27 June 1897, 3 August 1897, IE/BL/EP/G/842.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 24 August 1897, IE/BL/EP/G/842.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 6-7 Feb. 1895, IE/BL/EP/G/840 and 'Sporting News', *Family Journal*, October 1902, BL/EP/G/1391.

Mary O'Brien's croquet matches, or Katherine Everett's tennis matches or country cycles with her fiancé.³⁷⁴ Those women who were not involved in organised sports could still be physically active, and did not criticise the decision by other women to get involved, though they might get bored by sporting chatter.³⁷⁵ Mabel O'Brien was not a member of the hunting community but she enjoyed climbing up to the tree-house made by her nieces.³⁷⁶ 'The wish to hunt was killed' in Lady Carbery, when she accidentally saw the fox being slaughtered by the pack when she was still a teenager.³⁷⁷ As an adult she had little interest in the activity, but thoroughly enjoyed riding and went out on her favourite mare every morning at 7.45.³⁷⁸ Nelly O'Brien reported that as a twenty-three-year-old, she and a friend 'jumped, climbed trees & even went as far as to take off [their] hats & lie down preparatory to rolling down the grass slope', but thought better of it when they saw a man nearby.³⁷⁹ These women had the physical strength to enjoy the entertainments which the world had to offer, but this world still deemed them to be the weaker sex.

Travel

Women in this sample travelled in Ireland, Britain, Scandinavia, throughout Continental Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Australia, Canada and the United States. They visited cities, stayed in rural towns and villages, or camped in the wild. They climbed mountains, inspected troops, toured historical sites, dined with local dignitaries, shopped, or sketched the landscape. They travelled and toured by boat, train, car, bicycle, horseback, mule, donkey, and on foot. International travel was a common feature of honeymoons, but could also be carried out by a family group or a pair of single women, or even by lone women. Some women seemed to gain freedom of movement when they married and others appeared to be more curtailed. Similarly, the degree of autonomy of single women varied,

³⁷⁴ Visitor book, Moor Park, Mary O'Brien to Lady Molyneux NLI/MS/36,767; Everett, *Bricks*, pp. 61, 92.

³⁷⁵ LE Leigh to Countess Bantry, 12 Nov. 1880, Sandford (ed.), *West Cork Journal*, p. 123.

³⁷⁶ Mabel O'Brien to Julia O'Brien, NLI/MS/36,795 2.

³⁷⁷ Carbery, *Happy world*, p. 30.

³⁷⁸ Sandford (ed.), *West Cork Journal*, p. 51.

³⁷⁹ Nelly O'Brien to Dermod O'Brien [1887], NLI/MS/36,779/1.

but generally appears to have improved as the period progressed. On all of their travels, these women were linked by their sense of belonging to a social elite. The dominance which they enjoyed in their homes, over those of a lower social class, and sometimes over members of their own family, translated to the wider world, where they were treated with the obsequiousness they were used to receiving on the family estate.

As a child, Lady Carbery remembered that she and her mother always walked in the middle of the road, and drivers had to 'take pains' to make way for them.³⁸⁰ Twice a year, Mary, her numerous siblings and her mother would travel from Hertfordshire to visit her maternal grandmother in Berkshire. On arrival at the local station, the station guard brought them to their platform, and the under-porter rang a 'dinner-bell' to warn them that their train was approaching. Then the guard introduced them to the 'train-guard'. On arrival at St. Pancras

the train-guard stands us up like nine-pins till a carriage, hired by a letter from Papa draws up. Butty [the servant in charge of the luggage] goes off in a four-wheel cab with the luggage. If we went in a cab we might catch some illness.

The family were then met at Paddington station by a retainer in the first-class waiting room and were served tea and sandwiches. 'If other travellers want to come into the waiting-room, she [the servant] looks at them coldly and says, "The second-class waiting-room is three doors down ... they hurry on, looking ashamed."³⁸¹ In the first years of the twentieth century, Lady Carbery was still able to command this level of attention at a railway station. The stationmaster at Clonakilty, who was 'all-agog', was given notice of when to expect her and her party and set up breakfast for them on the platform.³⁸² Such aristocratic women had the power to demand public deference be paid to them when travelling.

Lady Carbery was a woman who, by social standing, wealth, confidence, or pure charm, was capable of getting what she wanted, and her travel experiences were the ideal. Less wealthy and prestigious women in the sample had to make do with more modest

³⁸⁰ Carbery, *Happy world*, p. 69.

³⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 50-51.

³⁸² Lady Carbery was bringing patients to Cork. Sandford (ed.), *West Cork Journal*, p. 45-46.

travel arrangements. For Esther Grehan, and her family, the further they travelled from their home, the more their influence waned. She and her husband could have the mail train make a special stop to collect them at Mallow, to best facilitate their travel arrangements, but further from home they became just another well-dressed wealthy couple.³⁸³ In April 1898, they, and Esther's maid Louisa travelled from Davos, Switzerland, to Clonmeen via a circuitous route, which included a visit to Lourdes. While Lady Carbery prided herself on her innocence of money matters, Esther Grehan was watchful of the price of accommodation and transport. She was reasonably impressed when they travelled second class from Geneva to Lyon 'which was excellent when not crowded,'³⁸⁴ but endured disappointment with a number of their hotels. They suffered 'inferior' dinners, and in both Geneva and Toulouse they were insulted when they were allocated second-rate fourth-floor apartments, and not the best first-floor rooms, even though they were not occupied by other guests.³⁸⁵ Unlike Lady Carbery, the Grehans could not afford a servant to go before them to ensure everything was to their satisfaction.

Mary O'Brien of Cahirmoyle also had to make the best of more reduced circumstances when travelling. She wrote to her mother from her 1863 honeymoon tour in Genoa that 'the inns could certainly not be called good' but that she would be happy to stay 'almost anywhere provided it was not dirty.'³⁸⁶ A little over a year later they were back, this time with 'a 9 month old Baby and a scatter brained fool of a nurse.'³⁸⁷ Even with this additional burden they did not afford themselves greater luxury, and in Genoa 'had only one room for our bedroom, Edward's dressing room, nursery and general sitting room.'³⁸⁸ Like the Grehans, Mary and her husband were conscious of money and she wrote: 'We

³⁸³ Esther Grehan, diary entry, 22 Nov. 1898, IE/BL/EP/G/842.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 8 Apr. 1898, IE/BL/EP/G/843.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 4 Apr.

³⁸⁶ Mary O'Brien to Ellen Mary Spring-Rice, 9 Nov. 1863, NLI/MS/36,758/2.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 17 Mar. 1865, NLI/MS/36,758/2.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

have got into the land of bargaining certainly.³⁸⁹ Despite the tiring travel, delays at customs, and her own questionable health, Mary enjoyed her travels in Europe.³⁹⁰ She was able to look beyond the guide book and assess places herself. She found San Remo overrated, but felt 'Menton the most lovely place that I have seen on the whole coast.'³⁹¹ On these journeys, Edward was the dominant partner, it was he who organised their itineraries, and engaged in bargaining with locals. Mary's marriage allowed her to see some of the delights Europe had to offer.

Many women in this sample embraced their own personal adventures when travelling and enjoyed the novelty of reduced comforts in a new location. For some women, such as Lady Leigh, the novelty of finding an apartment and haggling with a landlady was considered noteworthy enough to be included in a letter home from honeymoon in 1874.³⁹² This was the first time she ever had any real influence over expenditure, and was extremely pleased with herself that they found an apartment to rent in Florence, which she found more pleasant and 'ever so better for your purse!' than staying in a hotel. They rented a piano and were delighted to find a reading room with English papers.³⁹³ She sought praise from her parents for finding such a place, and for arranging with a nearby hotel to deliver their meals, writing; 'I want Mother to tell me whether this is good managing, I think it is excellent!!! & our food is quite excellent, far more than we two eat, & plain and well cooked!!'³⁹⁴ Elizabeth was living a simpler, but more independent, version of her life before marriage. It was this independence, rather than touring itself (which she had little interest in) that was her triumph.³⁹⁵ She preferred to stay at their lodgings or hotel and 'write Home letters'.³⁹⁶

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Mary O'Brien to Ellen Mary Spring-Rice, 9 Nov. 1863, NLI/MS/36,758/2.

³⁹² Elizabeth Leigh to 3rd Earl Bantry, [Oct/Nov] 1874, IE/BL/EP/B/2443.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 16 Sept. 1874, IE/BL/EP/B/2442, and 2443.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 3 Sept. 1874, IE/BL/EP/B/2441.

Even those women who were braver in their choice of location than the Leighs might cling, perhaps unconsciously, to the pattern of life at home. Katherine recounted how one day her aunt Louisa, a 'society beauty', who lived in 'luxurious surroundings' in Eaton Square, London, invited her on a trip to America and British Columbia. When Katherine wondered at her choice she was reported as saying,

Why not? ... [How] unimaginative of you to be so surprised. I know Europe, Egypt, and Tangier so well, I want to see new, young countries. I have been reading about British Columbia; it sounds interesting and lovely; and now there is all this excitement about the Klondike gold rush.³⁹⁷

Katherine's aunt was looking for an adventure, and a change of scene and society. While in British Columbia they travelled by train, and walked in snow shoes. Katherine was given a tour down a mine, 'escorted by friendly guides' and 'allowed to work a compressed-air drill.'³⁹⁸ For Aunt Louisa, 'accustomed to living in a large, well staffed London house', it was a comic relief 'to have just one Chinese servant do everything.'³⁹⁹ After their time away, it was this simplicity which was their lasting memory.⁴⁰⁰

At all times, aunt and niece were treated with deference. When they were travelling through the Rockies, Katherine was 'allowed to travel over the pass in the cab of the engine-driver' to learn about the history of the railway line.⁴⁰¹ When they went to a mining camp, a special railway carriage was arranged for them. 'The men had made great preparations' for them, even bringing in a Chinese cook.⁴⁰² Still the constraints of the social structures of their class followed them. When Katherine was offered a job as a personal agent, reporting on various engineering projects to the head of the Canadian Cable Company, Louisa was shocked, and felt he should not have even tried to put Katherine in such a position:

³⁹⁷ Everett, *Bricks*, p. 81.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 85.

Don't you see it is all very well for you to run about with a lot of young men and gain their confidence, with my eye always upon you, but it would be quite another to do this as a commercial business once you were alone.⁴⁰³

Katherine was still a daughter of the landed class of marriageable age, and must be treated as such.

This attachment to the social and gender norms can be seen even more clearly in the travel journal of Ethel Foster, later Lady Inchiquin, which recounted her trip to Africa with her mother, sister and uncle in 1894.⁴⁰⁴ Ethel, who had already travelled in Europe, was extremely excited about the trip and expected it to be exotic, as her journal makes plain.⁴⁰⁵

Beautiful! Africa!

The view at 7a.m. sailing in to the harbour ... was beyond description. I shall never forget it... an Eastern early morning haze, palms against the sky, sea gulls floating about[,] a dolphin jumping! White flat-roofed houses, ships & barges with many coloured natives[,] when we stopped at the landing place we were invaded by a rush of natives, nearly crushed in the commotion!⁴⁰⁶

While in Egypt they toured the ancient sites and went on a cruise up the Nile. They learned something of Egyptian culture, witnessed a wedding and visited a harem.⁴⁰⁷ They even ventured into more remote areas to have tea with officers at a tented army camp. Ethel felt sorry for these men, as they were 'quite alone,' with only troops of Berber and Sudanese origin for company.⁴⁰⁸ Even in such remote places, the Fosters had every resource available to them. They travelled in a train protected by fifty troops. Ethel found this exciting, if nerve wracking.⁴⁰⁹ As she reported, this was in contrast to her sister, who relished the sense of freedom:

It was a delightful expedition, but I did not enjoy it so thoroughly as Bee [her sister], as I am not fond of even the idea of danger! & the dervishes were always

⁴⁰³ Ibid., p. 87.

⁴⁰⁴ Ethel Foster, Journal 1894, NLI/MS/14,742.

⁴⁰⁵ Ethel Foster, journal entry 24 January 1894, NLI/MS/14,742. Referred to spring in Rome in 1892, 7 Feb.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 31 Jan.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., Feb.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 8 Mar.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.,

mentally before me! Bee was not like herself, she was so wonderfully lighthearted & gay.⁴¹⁰

Ethel acted as though she was in a British or European city, and the family went to dinner parties, for drives, dropped visiting cards, and attended the opera. Her account of her first full day in Cairo, could easily have applied to her first day after arriving in London, or any European city:

Mother & I stayed in the morning. I was very tired. Unpacked our things – In A[fternoon]. we all drove to ... the Tournament, met Mr & Mrs Cookson on their honeymoon also Lady Margaret Lavett & Lady Evelyn Cobbard. Tea in ... Palace hotel, huge place built by Ishmaiel [sic] Pasha, marble stair case.⁴¹¹

Foreign travel gave these women an opportunity to observe other countries and cultures, but none made any attempt to 'go native' or integrate in any way with those they met.

Of all the women in the sample, Lady Carbery seems to have most delighted in unusual travel. She was fascinated by gypsy culture, and had her own custom-made caravan named 'Creeping Jenny' – complete with a bath. She travelled in England, Wales, Ireland and Continental Europe in this way, though 'the caravan was sometimes sent on ahead by barge or train.'⁴¹² She was equally comfortable having the Clonakilty stationmaster wait on her, as she was travelling the back roads of West Cork in her caravan. For Mary, who was so comfortable and financially secure in her social position, the world at large was a pleasure ground.

While the women in this study were in a position to travel widely, they could not always do so alone. Lady Carbery only purchased Creeping Jenny in her widowhood. In the first decade of this study it was not deemed acceptable for unmarried women to travel alone. In 1859 Mary O'Brien wrote from London, before her marriage, that she was stranded at home, unable to attend her drawing class, 'for want of an escort'.⁴¹³ She made this comment without any apparent sense of injustice and fully accepted that it would be

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 9 Mar,

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 1 Feb.

⁴¹² Sandford, 'Epilogue', *West Cork Journal*, p. 147.

⁴¹³ Mary O'Brien to Lady Molyneux, 26 July 1859, NLI/MS/36,767.

entirely impossible to walk the London streets alone. Her husband, Edward, appeared to have shared that view, and arranged for chaperones to accompany his unmarried sister across from England, and disliked his daughters being without a companion.⁴¹⁴ However this convention was on the wane and over the course of this period single women gained more freedom of movement, both in the act of travelling between two familiar locations, and in travel as a leisure activity. Lady Ina White travelled freely between various family and friends during the 1870s and 1880s, writing to her father that she had just arrived ‘on a little visit to Lizzie and Egie’, while her mother was still in London. She informed him of her plans to travel across to Ireland, the train she would take, and other travel arrangements.⁴¹⁵ In 1882, Esther Grehan considered a chaperone to be a welcome luxury, rather than a necessity, as ‘it is not pleasant travelling by one’s self at night & one feels as if one belonged to nobody.’⁴¹⁶

Nelly O’Brien, who remained unmarried, gained increased freedom during her lifetime, due to a combination of loosening social conventions generally, and her increasing age. When she was at least twenty-three, a plan was made where she would chaperone a teenage relative, ‘Bob’, around Europe. It was just a dream however, and Nelly knew that her father would forbid it, ‘on the score of propriety’.⁴¹⁷ A year later, she travelled alone, by train, to visit her young half-brother at his school. She reported: ‘The great event in London was my going down to see Connor, don’t you think it was very bold of me all by myself?’⁴¹⁸ In 1891, at the very marriageable age of twenty-seven, she crossed the English Channel on her own. Such independent travel was still new to her, but she was happy to report that it was a ‘most successful journey[,] the only part I didn’t quite like being dinner on board amongst a lot of men & only one French lady’, whom she described as a ‘strange

⁴¹⁴ Edward O’Brien to Charlotte Grace O’Brien, 1 Aug. 67, 11 May 1868. NLI/MS/36,370/1; to Julia O’Brien, 6 Dec. 1881, NLI/MS/36,758/1.

⁴¹⁵ Ina White to 3rd Earl Bantry, IE/BL/EP/B/2490, see also IE/BL/EP/B/2491-5.

⁴¹⁶ Esther Chicester to Stephen Grehan, 17 Nov. 1882, IE/BL/EP/B/685.

⁴¹⁷ Nelly O’Brien to Dermot O’Brien, 11 Dec. 1887, NLI/MS/36,779 /1.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26 June [1888≤], NLI/MS/36,779 (3).

specimen.⁴¹⁹ By the age of thirty-six, she was in a position where she could travel freely by bicycle, train, or boat to visit friends and relatives. She was even offered the well-paid position of guide to a ward (and her mother) of the Lord Chancellor, Lord Ashbourne. She turned down the offer because she 'hadn't the enterprise to be for so long with people who might be a drag'.⁴²⁰

Christine Chichester, the unmarried sister of Esther Grehan and a near contemporary of Nelly O'Brien, was an avid traveller. She travelled widely in Britain and as far away as Constantinople.⁴²¹ In one edition of the Grehan family journal, Christine recounted her travels in Corsica, where she went with a companion, Mrs Cave, and a maid.⁴²² Christine considered her actions as independent and forward-thinking, and reported that she allowed her maid to sit with her at dinner.⁴²³ She wrote proudly that she felt free to converse openly with some French officers on political issues. These men were surprised at two women travelling without a male escort, as they believed no French women would be able to do so.⁴²⁴

The woman who was most controlled in her movements by her male relative was Olive, the wife of Lord Ardilaun, who predeceased her in 1915. While her unmarried sister Ina was writing to her father about her independent travel arrangements, and her mother was moving between houses independently, Olive was most elaborately protected from the rigours of travel, and never took a tram or a bus, but always travelled in her own car, 'except on long journeys', such as when travelling to London:

My husband arranged it all. Our head coachman...always went three or four days before I did with a carriage and a pair of horses and a groom, then the second coachman would drive me down to Kingstown, where our agent met me and took me to the cabins engaged for me and my maid, which were full of flowers from my own garden. The footman who had been on the box driving down travelled on the

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 14 June 1891.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 14 March 1900, NLI/MS/36,779/2.

⁴²¹ Christine Chichester, Autograph Book, IE/BL/EP/G/1506.

⁴²² The Family Journal 9th Number June 1903, IE/BL/EP/G/1394.

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

same boat, so that when we reached Holyhead he was there to look after us and take us to our reserved carriage on the train...and when we arrived at Euston there would be dear old Horton and my own carriage to meet me.⁴²⁵

Such a journey allowed Olive to move between two of her private residences without ever speaking to a stranger. Letters from the time show that Ardilaun did indeed organise his wife's travel, and was careful to ensure her comfort.⁴²⁶ He was by far the wealthiest man in the sample, and was in a position to treat his wife so extravagantly. Ardilaun was also the most newly created peer. He was born the heir to the Guinness fortune, but was raised to become the first, and last, Baron Ardilaun. He was eager to establish himself as a leading member of the landed elite, and perhaps he used both his marriage to Olive, the daughter of an older landed family, and his treatment of her, as a way of expressing his own wealth.⁴²⁷ The way Olive recounted the story would suggest that she did not mind the fuss, and indeed enjoyed it. Perhaps, as the first of her sisters to marry, and as the wife of such a wealthy man, her vanity was nourished by such attention. Her independently minded sister Ina was less lucky on marriage, as her husband effectively imprisoned her in the house,⁴²⁸ but this, while unfortunate for Ina, did not represent the general experiences of women of this class who travelled widely, whether they were married or single.

Dress

While travelling, such women were careful to signify their social class in the way they presented themselves to the world. Personal appearance was of paramount importance throughout this period, as it was a signifier of social status. Women like Millicent Garret Fawcett and Josephine Butler, who campaigned on controversial issues, were always careful to dress in a respectable manner.⁴²⁹ Elaborate dress codes were

⁴²⁵ Lady Ardilaun, quoted in her cousin's memoir, Everett, *Bricks*, p. 168.

⁴²⁶ Lord Ardilaun to Countess Bantry, 2 Oct 1880, IE/BL/EP/B/2409. Lord Ardilaun to Countess Bantry, 6 Oct 1880, IE/BL/EP/B/2413.

⁴²⁷ His father's will was the largest ever when it was proven in 1868. Andy, Bielenberg, 'Elite formation', p. 134. M. Jeanne Peterson, *Family, love and work*, p. 191.

⁴²⁸ Everett, *Bricks*, p. 54.

⁴²⁹ Millicent Garret Fawcett was described as an 'attractive ladylike little person' by Gladstone's secretary. Cited in B. Caine, *Victorian feminists*, (Oxford, 1992), pp. 207, 218.

enforced in the first universities which permitted women to study in their halls, to ensure that they did not dress in a provocative manner.⁴³⁰ In Trinity College Dublin, female students were forced to wear academics when not accompanied by a chaperone, to ensure they were easily identifiable.⁴³¹ In a time when women could be arrested on suspicion of being a prostitute in certain towns and ports, public dress and appearance were more important than they are today. Dress differentiated the respectable from the undesirable. Women who dressed in a way which was deemed to blur this line could be lambasted in the press.⁴³²

Dress could bestow power on the wearer. Just as the riding habit made these women feel sexually desirable, expensive dress and diamonds reinforced their membership of the ruling elite. Even in the homes of friends, dress was quite formal. At dinner parties, guests donned full evening wear. Despite living in rural west Cork, Lady Carbery's evening garb was made in one of the leading London fashion houses, Jays Ltd of Regent Street. She wrote: 'my "Jay" clothes are invariably beautiful... Everything is white, stockings, shoes, lace handkerchief, fan, pearls, face.'⁴³³

At public events, appearance was of paramount importance. When Esther Grehan went to the Limerick races with her husband and Lord Fermoy among others, she kept her full-length coat on all day, as she only had her travelling clothes on underneath. She would have been ashamed to have been so underdressed at the races.⁴³⁴ Likewise, Mabel O'Brien once refused to meet her future husband, as she decided it was essential that she stay

⁴³⁰ O. Walsh, *Anglican women*, p. 83.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁴³² A. Kesselman, 'The "freedom suit": Feminism and dress reform in the United States 1845-1875,' *Gender and Society*, Vol. 5, No. 4. (Dec., 1991), 495-510: 500. 'Bloomerism, an American Custom', n.d. *Punch*, reproduced in J. Horowitz Murray, *Strong-minded women and other lost voices from nineteenth-century England* (Middlesex, 1984), p. 68.

⁴³³ *West Cork Journal*, 68 <http://about.nsw.gov.au/collections/doc/chiffon-tea-gown-by-jays-ltd-london-c1900/#>

⁴³⁴ Esther Grehan, diary entry, BL/EP/G.

home and re-trim a hat.⁴³⁵ Ethel, Lady Inchiquin listed the entire contents of her trousseau, as well as later additions to her wardrobe. Her clothes demonstrate the importance she placed on how she presented herself in public. She only possessed three tea gowns, which were worn while relaxing at home, sometimes without, or with a loosened corset.⁴³⁶ In contrast, her trousseau contained nineteen public day outfits, including a bicycle dress and a short dress, presumably for walking or golf, and fifteen dinner dresses, as well as a number of blouses and bodices, including two extremely fashionable pure lace white blouses.⁴³⁷ She possessed twenty-one summer hats, many of which were extravagant display pieces.⁴³⁸ Women wore hats at all outdoor events, and indeed left them on for a variety of indoor entertainments.⁴³⁹ There were advantages to demonstrating one's wealth and status through dress while out alone in public. Lady Carbery used her expensive wares for self-interested reasons:

Today I shopped in my sables. Such an advantage! One gets the attention of the great ones of the earth, such as Mr Hiley at Jays; also unlimited credit should one wish it. My sables got me a perpetual permit to examine the most secret and precious manuscripts at the British museum at my will. A fur coat is heavy to carry on one's back but worth the weight.⁴⁴⁰

Cultural Activity

In physical health and activity, the women of the landed class outdid the stereotypical lady of their class. In fashion, they carefully mimicked her, but in culture, women felt free to pick and choose the areas which most interested them. Women who lived much of their lives in provincial Munster could still be associated with the fashionable culture of the day. Gifford Lewis has demonstrated that while home was the most important thing in Edith Somerville's life, she was also closely connected to the outside world. She campaigned for women's suffrage, studied art at the Académie Julian while living in a cramped pension,

⁴³⁵ Mabel O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, 24 Oct. 1901, NLI/MS/36,699/1.

⁴³⁶ Steele, *Corset*, p. 109

⁴³⁷ E. Ewing, *History of fashion*, Fashion plates, pp. 21,50.

⁴³⁸ Inventory of Ethel, Lady Inchiquin's wardrobe, 1898-1899, NLI/MS/45,531/4.

⁴³⁹ *Manners and rules*, p. 158.

⁴⁴⁰ Sandford (ed.), *West Cork Journal* p. 121, see also <http://www.gjenvick.com/Fashions/1907-Adv-JaysLtd-London.html#axzz2LGTbsI9M> accessed on 2 June 2013.

and travelled to America.⁴⁴¹ Some families and individuals were more in-tune with these movements than others. Esther Grehan was conservative in her cultural interests, and limited herself to the most popular literary works of the day. She wrote to her fiancé:

Last night I finished the first vol. of *Middlemarch*. It is some time since I have read a book I liked so much[,] I don't understand it all by any means- it goes rather deep but I like finding some of one's vague ideas written down & explained in black and white.⁴⁴²

She had also been advised 'to read that [humorous] piece of Thackeray'.⁴⁴³ She thought Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*, which was enjoying a popular run in the Lyceum theatre, was 'quite lovely'.⁴⁴⁴ Thackeray had died in 1863 as one of the most famous authors of his day, and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* was extremely popular from the date of publication. After her marriage, cultural references became even less frequent, as Esther was caught up in the typical 'hunting, shooting, fishing' lifestyle of the country gentry.

Family played an important role in cultivating the minds of each member. The Spring-Rice family was interested in poetry and literature, and Mary O'Brien knew the poet, Aubrey de Vere, a contemporary of Wordsworth.⁴⁴⁵ Her grandfather, the first Baron Monteagle, and Aubrey de Vere's uncle, fancied himself a poet.⁴⁴⁶ Her father was a member of the intellectual and liberal society, the Apostle's Club in Cambridge.⁴⁴⁷ Such an environment facilitated Mary's interest in the arts. London was the centre of elite society's culture, and those women who could visit regularly had the opportunity of encountering

⁴⁴¹ G. Lewis, *Edith Somerville*, pp. 77, 360.

⁴⁴² Esther Chichester to Stephen Grehan, 27 Oct. 1882. IE/BL/EP/G/669.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 2 Dec. 1882. IE/BL/EP/G/691. See also: <http://www.theatrememorabilia.co.uk/london-royal-lyceum-theatre-much-ado-about-nothing-229.html> and <http://www.lyceum-theatre.co.uk/>, accessed on 29 May 2013.

⁴⁴⁵ Robert Welch, 'Vere, Aubrey Thomas de (1814–1902)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oct 2006 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.library.ucc.ie/view/article/32797>, accessed 21 Aug 2013], Tom Kelley and Linde Lunney, 'De Vere, Aubrey Thomas', <http://0-dib.cambridge.org.library.ucc.ie/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a2479&searchClicked=clicked&quickadvsearch=yes> accessed on 21 Aug. 2013.

⁴⁴⁶ Poem dated 26 Dec. 1864, NLI/MS/36.810.

⁴⁴⁷ W.C. Lubenow, *The Cambridge Apostles, 1820-1914: Liberalism, Imagination, and Friendship in British Intellectual and Political Life* (Cambridge, 1998).

the latest cultural experiences. Mary O'Brien joined in all the fashionable entertainment. She watched up-and-coming opera singers and ground-breaking productions of plays, but spurned less high-brow entertainment. She also visited exhibitions at the Royal Academy of Art which featured the works of those deemed to be the leading artists of her day. Various representations of the nude figure were on display, so she could visit the academy without a male chaperone to escort her. Her family had no problem with her attending, and she was taken by her Uncle Willy, though she suggests that not all men were comfortable discussing art that had sexual undertones with a young unmarried woman:

I have done everything that any gentleman asks after at an evening party, tho' indeed since the picture in Puneke[?] I think it is only very weak minded or very strong minded gentlemen who venture to ask if one has been to the Academy. I have been to the Academy, as I said; I have been to the British Institution; I have been to both the Water Colour Exhibitions;⁴⁴⁸ I have seen the Colleen Bawn;⁴⁴⁹ Fetcher [sic];⁴⁵⁰ & heard Mlle. Patti⁴⁵¹ – what can mortal do more? Except to see Blondin⁴⁵² which I have no intention or inclination to do – I want very much to see Fetcher [sic] again, but I am afraid I shan't.⁴⁵³

Mary's letter demonstrates the breadth of cultural experiences available to women who had the privilege of frequently attending the London Season, and in her last months, her husband reported that she was 'just as much interested as ever in all that is interesting

⁴⁴⁸ George Warren's, *Rest in the cool and shady wood*, 'was a sensation at the 1861 exhibition of the New Society of Painters in Water colours.' 'British watercolours 1750-1900: the watercolour societies of the 19th century.' <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/b/british-watercolour-societies-19th-century/> accessed on 1 June 2013.

⁴⁴⁹ *Colleen Bawn* was a melodramatic play by Dion Boucicault. 'The play ran to full houses at the Adelphi for an unprecedented 230 performances.' Peter Thomson, 'Introduction', Peter Thomson (ed.), *Plays by Dion Boucicault*, (Cambridge, 1984), p. 10. See also Judith Flanders, *The invention of Murder: how the Victorians revelled in death and detection and created modern crime* (London, 2011).

⁴⁵⁰ Charles Fechter played the role of *Hamlet* from 20 March, 1861 at the Princess Theatre. It was a revolutionary performance and praised by Charles Dickens in "Fechter's Acting," *Atlantic Monthly* (August 1869), p. 244, quoted in John A. Mills, 'The Modesty of Nature: Charles Fechter's 'Hamlet'', in *Theatre Survey*, Volume 15, Issue 01, May 1974, pp 59-78. p. 59. See also; J. Mitchell, 'Mr. Fetcher in the Character of Hamlet; "My father—methinks I see my father"', (London, 1861)', http://kaga.wsulibs.wsu.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/butler&CISOPTR=684&CISOBX=1&REC=4 accessed on 1 June 2013.

⁴⁵¹ For brief biography see Charles C. Riker, 'The Adelina Patti Letters', *University Of Rochester Library Bulletin*, Volume II, Nov. 1946, Number 1. <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?PAGE=2434> accessed on 1 June 2013.

⁴⁵² Chevalier Blondin was a famous tight-rope walker, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/c/blondin/> accessed on 1 June 2013.

⁴⁵³ Mary O'Brien to Lady Molyneux, 18 June 1861, NLI/MS/36,767.

from theology to dress.’⁴⁵⁴ Such women might have been criticised for leading idle, purposeless lives, but with so much entertainment at their fingertips, it is easy to see that one could get carried away. Right at the end of the period, Ethel Lady Inchiquin became giddy when she got away to London. Between bazaars, calls, lunches, parties, shopping and numerous trips to the theatre, she barely had time to write to her husband. In one letter, she wrote: ‘My Darling Lucius I haven’t a moment to write today I am so sorry: We have just come back from the Merchant of Venice, it was splendid!...Sorry I didn’t write sooner today but you know London.’⁴⁵⁵ In another, her mother wrote: ‘My Dear Lucius, Ethel has again applied to me to write to you to tell you of her doings - & she wants to thank you so much for your letter this morning.’ Ethel just added the lines:

My darling Lucius Again I am writing in Mother’s paper. The time in London seems to go fearfully quickly, 6 o’ clock is here in no time. We have just come back from “Alice in Wonderland” such a good play, even so much more amusing than the Pantomime most intensely amusing.⁴⁵⁶

It was not unusual for her to extend her stay beyond the planned timeframe because she could not bring herself to leave.⁴⁵⁷

Katherine Everett remembered how her mind and experiences were broadened by one of her first visits to London. She recalled staying with the Ross family when she was ‘quite young’. She credited ‘Robbie Ross, Oscar Wilde’s faithful friend’, who was also friendly with her brother, as having an influence on her.⁴⁵⁸ As Katherine had never been to a theatre, the Rosses ‘determined to show me a great deal, taking me to private views, to museums, and galleries, to painters’ studios, and to several theatres,’ and arranged for her

⁴⁵⁴ Edward O’Brien to Charlotte Grace O’Brien, n.d. Dec. 1867, NLI/MS/36.370/1.

⁴⁵⁵ Ethel, Lady Inchiquin to Lucius, Baron Inchiquin, from Moor Park, n.d. 45,504/2 (emphasis original).

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., from 90 Eaton Square, S.W., n.d. [1907-8].

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., (later letter, same address) n.d.

⁴⁵⁸ Everett, *Bricks*, p. 256-7.

to meet Wilde.⁴⁵⁹ But women were not just consumers of the arts, they could also be practitioners.

Women as artists and writers

Female artists have rarely enjoyed commercial success, and many of those who did have been forgotten.⁴⁶⁰ In the early modern period, the notion that women could produce creative works of their own was hard to believe. Women were excluded from the professional art academies due to their 'perceived mental debility, in addition to the risk of sexual impropriety.'⁴⁶¹ This situation had barely improved by 1860. Women were excluded from the training required to master the skill of rendering nude figures, and were therefore denied the opportunity to reach the 'apex of artistic achievement'. They concentrated on the more 'humble media' of watercolour or crayon, and specialised in botanical studies.⁴⁶² In 1876, Eleanor Clayton, a Dublin born illustrator and writer, from a family of engravers, believed the situation in Ireland for female artists was even worse than elsewhere:

In Ireland a lady may seek notoriety as a rider, a huntress, or a flirt in the ball-room or promenade without committing any flagrant breach of propriety. She may attract every eye by the style and extravagance of her dress, provided always she be duly chaperoned...but woe be to her if Nature has been unkind enough to weight her with any extra portion of artistic talent, & with it the fatal desire to cultivate the same beyond that point which has been determined as the extreme limit of feminine indulgence or ladylike development. The moment she dares cross the Rubicon which separates so widely the professional artist from the fashionable amateur[,] she forgets...her social position, & is henceforth barely tolerated.⁴⁶³

Some women in Ireland appeared to be able to cross this Rubicon without undue censure.

Lady Elizabeth Butler executed impressive large-scale works, with 'masculine' themes that

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 257-8.

⁴⁶⁰ Various works have attempted to 'recover' successful female artists since the 1970s. See Nancy Heller, *Women artists: an illustrated history: revised and expanded edition*, (New York, 1991); O'Connor (ed.), *Irish women artists: 1800-2009* (Dublin, 2009).

⁴⁶¹ Julia K. Dabbs, *Life stories of women artists, 1550-1800: an anthology* (Farnham, 2009), p. 8.

⁴⁶² Nancy Heller, *Women artists*, p. 7; O'Connor (ed.), *Irish women artists: 1800-2009*, pp. 21.

⁴⁶³ Eleanor Clayton, *English female artists*, 2 vols. (London, 1878) p. 152, quoted in Jeanne Sheehy, 'The training and professional life of Irish women artists before the twentieth century' in Anne Crookshank et. al., *Irish women artists: from the eighteenth century to the present day* (Dublin, 1987), p. 9.

included military life. Her *Calling the Roll after an Engagement, Crimea*, was hung in the place of honour at the academy in 1874 and Queen Victoria arranged for a private viewing.⁴⁶⁴ Her case was an exceptional one. Louisa, Marchioness of Waterford, a member of the Munster landed class by marriage, was a talented painter and her work was deemed 'professional in quality', but, lacking proper training, she was wary of seeking acclaim.⁴⁶⁵ Mary Herbert of Muckross House was a dedicated watercolourist (Figs 19-22). Her work was not lacking in technical skill, and she was 'held to be the most gifted amateur in the kingdom.' Her paintings were shown to Queen Victoria on the occasion of the royal visit in 1861,⁴⁶⁶ but Mary only ever gave away her work as gifts – mainly to her husband.⁴⁶⁷ By describing women as amateurs, art historians are suggesting that their work was of a lesser quality than that of professional male artists.⁴⁶⁸ M. Jeanne Peterson has argued that upper-class women were more likely to pursue art not in an attempt to make money, as they did not need to, but as an 'organizing principle of ... life.'⁴⁶⁹ By approaching their art in this way it became not 'a bohemian alternative to respectability...but an integral part of middle class life.'⁴⁷⁰ While this was the case for Mary Herbert, by the end of the period under review, a number of female artists had gained recognition internationally as professional artists, and some women in this sample wished to go some way towards following them.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁴ Lady Elizabeth Butler, *Calling the roll after an engagement, Crimea*, 1874, Oil on Canvas, 36x72 in.. Nancy Heller, *Women artists*.

⁴⁶⁵ Myles Campbell, 'In a class of her own: Louisa Marchioness of Waterford (1818-91)', in É O'Connor (ed.), *Irish women artists*, pp. 58-70: 59.

⁴⁶⁶ *Irish Times*, 30, 26 Aug. 1861.

⁴⁶⁷ Sketchbook, Muckross Research library.

⁴⁶⁸ Éimear O'Connor, 'Introduction: a view from everywhere' in É. O'Connor (ed.), *Irish women artists*, pp. 19-27: 21.

⁴⁶⁹ M. Jeanne Peterson, *Family, love and work*, p. 150; Jeanne Sheehy, 'The training and professional life of Irish women artists before the twentieth century', p. 10.

⁴⁷⁰ M. Jeanne Peterson, *Family, love and work*, p. 152.

⁴⁷¹ E.g.: English genre painter Emily Mary Osborne (1828–1925), Oxford Dictionary of National Biography <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.library.ucc.ie/view/article/48916?docPos=2> accessed on 12 August 2013; the 'world's greatest animal painter', eccentric Frenchwoman Rosa May Bonheur (1822-1899), Nancy Heller, *Women artists*, pp. 90-1, and K. Peterson & J.J. Wilson, *Women artists: recognition and reappraisal from the early middle ages to the twentieth century* (first published, 1978, repr. 1985), pp. 74-8; and the leading impressionists – and better remembered – Berthe Morisot (1841-1895) and Mary Cassatt (1844-1926).

The forward-thinking neighbour of Katherine Everett, Lady Kenmare, had always believed Katherine should study art, and she secured orders for her to copy miniatures.⁴⁷² Katherine continued to add to her allowance through such 'precarious earnings' until her marriage.⁴⁷³ Her aunt Aurelia Everett financed her attendance at the South Kensington School of Art (where Edith Somerville was also a student⁴⁷⁴), but in 1896 Aurelia decided that she and Katherine should attend the more prestigious Slade School, along with Aurelia's son, and Katherine's future husband, Herbert.⁴⁷⁵ The Slade School taught men and women on the same basis, which may account for the fact that women made up two-thirds of the nearly 150 students registered when Katherine attended.⁴⁷⁶ Constance Markievicz was one of the women enrolled at the time. Katherine's memoir did not mention Markievicz, but instead focused on Henry Tonks, P. Wilson Steer, the John siblings – Augustus and Gwen – and the Irish artist Sir William Orpen, who was a distant relative.⁴⁷⁷ The Slade was a leading school at the time, and made a break from the stuffy Academy practices.⁴⁷⁸

It was run by artists, for artists. Its aim was to create men and women who could draw and paint...an association of practising artists who passed on their skills to younger men and women...it depended on the personality and authority exercised by key figures – Fred Brown, Philip Wilson Steer, Henry Tonks and Walter Russell.⁴⁷⁹

Katherine valued her time at the Slade. She was strongly influenced by her teacher, Henry Tonks, who taught her drawing and art history.⁴⁸⁰ The education provided by Tonks, a trained doctor, played a role in ensuring that she never attempted to become a

⁴⁷² Everett, *Bricks*, p. 38.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., p. 87.

⁴⁷⁴ Monika Wittmann and Otto Rauchbauer, 'Somerville, Edith Anna OEnone', <http://0-dib.cambridge.org.library.ucc.ie/quicksearch.do> accessed on 28th May 2013.

⁴⁷⁵ Everett, *Bricks*, p. 65, 70.

⁴⁷⁶ <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/slade/about/history>, accessed on 28th May 2013; B. Arnold, *Orpen*, p. 44.

⁴⁷⁷ 'Orpen related families Herbert of Cahirnane', <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/family-show.jsp?id=1848> Irish landed estates database, accessed on 20 Sept. 2013.

⁴⁷⁸ B. Arnold, *Orpen: Mirror to an age*, (London, 1981, repr. 1982), p. 41.

⁴⁷⁹ Arnold, *Orpen*, p. 38.

⁴⁸⁰ Everett, *Bricks*, p. 74; Lynda Morris, 'Tonks, Henry (1862–1937)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.library.ucc.ie/view/article/36535>, accessed 20 Sept 2013]

professional artist, as 'His method developed one's critical faculty so far beyond one's capacity that very few Slade students did desecrate walls with their efforts.'⁴⁸¹ Katherine's first cousin and husband Herbert Everett, however, 'was thought to be one of the most promising students at the Slade' and Katherine transferred to him her 'personal ambition regarding work and never doubted his having a great future.'⁴⁸² For a woman who 'wanted to have a career and be independent and ...thought women should have the same education as men' she was quick to assume the role of supportive wife.⁴⁸³ Though not the wife of a landlord, she acted in that sense as if she was, subsuming her ambitions within his. Dermot O'Brien of Cahermoyle, who was the President of the Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA) from 1910-45, observed in 1933 that 'pretty young girls' 'were certain to abandon the serious occupation of painting for the mere frivolity of marriage.'⁴⁸⁴

However, marriage was not the only barrier to artistic success. Dermot's sister Nelly had died unmarried in 1924, but her life had been an ad hoc attempt at gaining both artistic training and success. It is significant that the authors of the collection *Irish Women artists, 1800-2009: familiar but unknown*, which aims to rediscover female Irish artists, were unaware that Nelly, the sister of Dermot O'Brien, was an artist herself, and exhibited seventy-six works in the Royal Hibernian Academy between 1896 and 1922.⁴⁸⁵ Nor did she make it into Anne Crookshank's edited work, *Irish women artists: from the eighteenth century to the present day*.⁴⁸⁶ These are not to be censured for the oversight, as Nelly was not viewed as 'an artist', even by her family. While her brother was funded to travel to

⁴⁸¹ Everett, *Bricks*, p. 74.

⁴⁸² Ibid. 92-93.

⁴⁸³ Ibid. p. 257.

⁴⁸⁴ Dermot O'Brien to Betty Brooks, 1 Oct. 1933 quoted in Yvonne Scott, 'Foreword: marginality as productive space' in É. O'Connor (ed.), *Irish women artists*, pp. 11-16:15.

⁴⁸⁵ Stewart, *Index of exhibitors*, p. 26.

⁴⁸⁶ A. Crookshank et. al., *Irish women artists: from the eighteenth century to the present day* (Dublin, 1987).

Antwerp and Rome to train, Nelly had to be content with the odd term at the Slade or the South Kensington.⁴⁸⁷

The two siblings probably started off with a similar level of technical ability, and she was 'distracted' to think how much he would get 'much ahead of [her] before] he returned'. While he was getting the best of teaching, she wrote: 'I find it so difficult to get in any regular work between my lessons[,] not having a proper room.'⁴⁸⁸ Even when she was lucky enough to attend lessons, they were of a low standard, both in terms of curriculum and of student quality:

I have had two days at the S[outh]. K[ensington] now. The first day I did 6 mouths & 6 eyes – outlines from casks & the second day we were put to draw cubes & crosses & things of that nature which the master explained & illustrated on a black board. I haven't made out yet whether I shall be obliged to go through the whole course which would take a long time as you have to attend a certain number of lectures before you can get moved to a higher room, or whether I shall be able to get it modified. The students there[,] the girls at any rate are a very funny lot indeed. They don't seem to trouble themselves to do very much work & take out their books or sewing or letters as soon as the master's back is turned. I am in the lowest room, so perhaps they are more industrious higher up.⁴⁸⁹

She was forced to try and glean some of her brother's training at second hand, and constantly bombarded him with questions from her eagerness to learn. As these related to nude models, he did not seem to have been inclined to answer, though he discussed the subject with artistic male friends:

I do want to hear about your drawing[.] Why don't you tell me? I want to know what casts you are doing & if you take a long time about them[,] chalk or charcoal? & about the life class[,] do you get much help or any & are there many working there[,] how much good is your friend Mr Clunnis. Mr Burne-Jones told us he had a letter from you & that you were in raptures over the models[.] Describe, & how big do you do them & what sort of paper & do you rub on with your hands[.] we went to a teaparty in Mr BJ's studio.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁷ Ellen Lucy O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, Slade, 25 Apr. 1889, NLI/MS/36,779/1.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 23 Jan [87]

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 2 Dec. 1887.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 3 Feb. 1887.

Throughout her life, Nelly's artistic endeavours were secondary to her domestic duties and family ties.⁴⁹¹ She fought with her father to ensure he would fund Dermot in his quest to be an artist, but does not appear to have made the same pitch for herself.⁴⁹² She supported her brother's career in every way possible, but he does not seem to have aided her, beyond buying her the odd tube of paint.⁴⁹³ Indeed, when she had her own studio, and students of her own, she had to ask him: 'Don't scoff at my teaching. I can harangue in quite good style & correct beginners.'⁴⁹⁴ She enjoyed teaching, as she could work away herself while the student was in the studio.⁴⁹⁵ He refused to take her seriously as an artist and in 1898 she wrote to him to explain how she was faring:

You don't seem to realise the amount of business I have been doing the last few months so I subjoin a list of my commissions[:]

1. Miss J Moloney small oil painting £2.2.0
2. Master F McKeown oil & potatoes for 6 m[onth]s
3. Mrs Wilson £1.1.0
4. Master R Gill 2.2.0
5. Miss F Gill 2.2.0
6. Master C Gill 2.2.0

Then there's £6 for lessons & a flower painting for Aunt J[ulia] which I don't know when I shall get time to do & a couple of other portraits which may come to something[,] so you see I think I may be able be said to have made a start in a humble way & shall raise my prices in the autumn. The Gills are rather a good connection as he is editor of the Express & knows a lot of people.⁴⁹⁶

She exhibited three of these works at the RHA in 1899 and inquired about entering two miniatures for the Academy in 1900, but 'got ill & could not finish one & the other was troublesome to frame.'⁴⁹⁷ Still it was not just a lack of direct family support that affected Nelly's success. Perhaps owing to her lack of training in any particular technique or genre, she dabbled in portraiture (of adults and children), miniatures, illustrations, flower

⁴⁹¹ Ibid, NLI/MS/36,779.

⁴⁹² Ibid, 12 May 1887; Ibid., 9. Oct. n.d. NLI/MS/36,779/3.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., [Aug, 1885], NLI/MS/36,779/1.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 16 May 1898, NLI/MS/36,779/2.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 27 Mar. 1898.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 12 June 1898.

⁴⁹⁷ Stewart, *Index of exhibitors* p. 26; Ibid., 14 March 1900 and n.d. [1900].

paintings and even fashion plates, without ever settling entirely on one.⁴⁹⁸ Despite the obvious commitment she gave, she was afraid to be seen to try too hard to succeed, writing, unconvincingly, that: 'it really doesn't pay to go too hard at it[;] one gets headaches & knocks up.'⁴⁹⁹ She wrote that she was practising her art in a 'humble' way, and did not claim the same ambition for herself as she held for Dermod.⁵⁰⁰ Essentially, she was afraid of criticism:

None of my clients have payed[sic] up as yet...but it doesn't matter. A very little business keeps one going & prevents one from feeling too morbidly that the eyes of the world are upon one & spying out what a fool I'm making of myself in going in for Art!⁵⁰¹

Both Nelly O'Brien and Katherine Everett put their own talent a poor second behind the ambitions of the men in their lives. Lady Carbery once lamented: 'I want to be in the interesting Ruskin, Matthew Arnold set, only I don't know how to get in.'⁵⁰² Her exclusion was not, necessarily, owing to her gender, but rather her lack of involvement in the artistic world. Both Nelly and Katherine inhabited the artistic society centred around Slade School alumni, and were acquainted with each other. Nelly wrote of Katherine:

I've made acquaintance with a Slade friend of Eily's who she says I'm to befriend[;], though she looks to me like a girl who could very well look after herself[.] She is a Miss [Katherine] Herbert a niece of Mrs Everett & I expect has some sparks in her[;] a striking looking pleasant girl.⁵⁰³

Both women were familiar with Tonks, who lived with Nelly's brother Dermod for a time, and stayed with Katherine and her husband for the summer of 1908, when he used her as a muse (Fig. 17).⁵⁰⁴ Katherine devoted a chapter of her memoir to 'Artists and others I have known', in which she described her visit to Rodin's studio in Paris and also retold some of her conversations with George Moore, with whom she enjoyed discussing art, but found

⁴⁹⁸ Nelly to Dermod, Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 12 June 1898, NLI/MS/36,779/2.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., n.d. NLI/MS/36,779/2.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 9 Oct. n.d. NLI/MS/36,779/3.

⁵⁰² Sandford (ed), *West Cork Journal* p. 123.

⁵⁰³ Ellen Lucy O'Brien to Dermod O'Brien, 28 Sept [1898]. NLI/MS/36,779 (3).

⁵⁰⁴ Everett, *Bricks*, p. 127-8.

‘really tiresome’ when ‘he launched into his favourite subject of sex.’⁵⁰⁵ When describing a visit from the artist Augustus John to their Dorset home, Katherine drew a comparison between herself and a cousin, presumably a member of the Irish landed class. The cousin, who was ‘fond of hunting and unacquainted with any artists, was puzzled and not favourably impressed’ by the artist who had married his mistress and lived a bohemian lifestyle.⁵⁰⁶ Katherine suggested that she was not shocked by ‘those unusual people’ and their ways.⁵⁰⁷ Even allowing for the haziness of distant memory, it is clear that Katherine did not feel intimidated by socialising with an artistic and literary set. The same was true of Nelly, who mourned the death of Matthew Arnold and pitied his ‘nice little’ wife.⁵⁰⁸ Her ideas were her own and when Arnold died she lamented: ‘why wasn’t it Ruskin instead who is only disgracing himself.’ She may have been referring to the latter’s increasing mental ill-health, or to his questionable relationships with much-younger women such as Rose la Touche, and the art student Kathleen Olander.⁵⁰⁹ ‘I saw him the other day in the S[outh] K[ensington] refreshment room having luncheon with a young woman[,] who I thought looked rather uncomfortable & oppressed by the honour.’⁵¹⁰

Both women moved in this artistic world while retaining their conservative values. While attending the Slade, Katherine lived with her aunt Aurelia, who had bought a house at 21 Fitzroy Street, Camden, reportedly an ex-brothel, and rented out rooms to art students.⁵¹¹ The lodgers did not always act with decorum. Augustus John slept on a chair when he was drunk, and was a notorious womaniser.⁵¹² Katherine sometimes needed to

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 264.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 261.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 262-3.

⁵⁰⁸ Ellen Lucy O’Brien to Dermot O’Brien, 1 May 1888, NLI/MS/36,779/1.

⁵⁰⁹ Robert Hewison, ‘Ruskin, John (1819–1900)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2010 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.library.ucc.ie/view/article/24291>, accessed 21 Aug 2013]

⁵¹⁰ Ellen Lucy O’Brien to Dermot O’Brien, 1 May 1888, NLI/MS/36,779/1.

⁵¹¹ No reference is given for this assumption in B. Arnold, *Orpen: mirror to an age* (Milan, 1981). M. Holroyd, *Augustus John* (London, 1996).

⁵¹² Holroyd, *John*, pp. 98, 99, 101.

escape to the 'orderly and luxurious surroundings of' her Aunt Louisa's home, where they had planned their North American adventure.⁵¹³ Orpen, whom she referred to as Billy, painted some of his early works, such as *The Mirror* and *A Mere Fracture*, in the house.⁵¹⁴ The subject of *The Mirror* was Orpen's mistress, whom he had also used for *The English Nude*.⁵¹⁵ Katherine's memoir suggested no awareness of the sexual freedom of these artists and their set.⁵¹⁶ Whether she approved or not, she must have been aware of the carousing that went on around her, though she refused to remember it in her memoir. She did not belong with the more avant-garde members of the group, and after her divorce, which took place in 1914 or 1915, she did not retain these relationships.

These women could not, and did not want to, shake off the notions of propriety that were attached to their class. Some women felt these confines to be stricter than others. While Everett visited George Moore as a married woman, Mabel O'Brien, herself something of an artist, and friend and future sister-in-law of Nelly, asked her mother's advice on attending a dinner party at which he would be in attendance. The decision, while she was a single woman at least, was to avoid him.⁵¹⁷ Mabel would not risk tarnishing her unimpeachable reputation. Perhaps she was being over-careful, as even her future mother-in-law was happy to think that the 'first Smyly [Mabel's maiden name] stiffness' would wear off.⁵¹⁸

The steadily improving access for women to education ensured that some of these women could attend Art College. This was a direct benefit of the early stirrings of the various movements for increased women's rights. While these women were happy to reap the rewards of the campaign, they remained a conservative group, more tied to the interests of their family and their class, than to the emancipating calls of their sex.

⁵¹³ K. Everett, *Bricks*, p. 81.

⁵¹⁴ *The Mirror*, 1900 Oil on Canvas, Tate. *A Mere Fracture*, oil on canvas, 1901.

⁵¹⁵ *The British Nude*, 1900, oil on canvas, 1900, Mildura Arts Centre.

⁵¹⁶ Holroyd, *John*, pp. 100-1.

⁵¹⁷ Mabel O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, 22 Jan. 1902, NLI/MS/36,699/2..

⁵¹⁸ Julia O'Brien to Edward O'Brien, 17 Jan. 1902, NLI/MS/36,772.

Writing was another possible avenue of activity for these women. Some of the men in their families were published authors of articles or memoirs, and wrote letters to newspapers on various political subjects.⁵¹⁹ As with art, no women in this sample made any substantial income from their pens, but it did give them an avenue of public self-expression. Writing and scholarly work was largely done for self-fulfilment, and could be a private pastime, though a few became published authors.⁵²⁰ Charlotte Grace O'Brien published three collections of poetry, and felt the need to disseminate her knowledge of gardening to a wider public, though even her favourite niece, Nelly, questioned her judgement in publishing such 'intimate' articles.⁵²¹ In old age, and outside the years of this study, Katherine Everett and Lady Carbery wrote memoirs for publication. Both lamented the passing of what they deemed to be a better time. Katherine Everett comes across as an intelligent, independent, but deeply conservative woman, now somewhat lost in the overly-democratic atmosphere of 1940s England. Carbery's efforts presented the past almost as a dream, and offered a vision of idyllic family life, where all classes existed in harmony and were content in their own station. These two works unveil a good deal of the public outlook of their authors, and not just in old age.

Women's movement

In 1912, the *Irish Citizen* listed all the suffrage associations in Ireland, and 'declared that there were 3000 active women suffragists in Ireland.'⁵²² The various campaigns for greater equality of the sexes regarding education, suffrage, sexuality and property involved women acting in an overtly political manner; from arranging meetings and petitions, making speeches, and running committees, to the eventual militant activity of the Irish Women's

⁵¹⁹ , Lt. Col. C. Raleigh Chichester, 'Irish Landlordism' (Dublin, 1887), IE/BL/EP/G/505; Lord Castletown, *Ego* and other publications; Ellen Lucy O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, 7 Nov. 1889, NLI/MS/36,779/1.

⁵²⁰ Carbery, *The farm by Lough Gur: the story of Mary Fogarty*, (first published London, 1937; repr. Dublin 2010); and the second, her childhood memoir Carbery, *Happy world*; Carbery (ed.), *Mrs. Elizabeth Freke: her diary, 1671 to 1714*, (London, 1913).

⁵²¹ Ellen Lucy O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, n.d., NLI/MS/36,779/3.

⁵²² *Irish Citizen*, 25 May 1912, quoted in C. Murphy, *Women and Irish society in the early twentieth century* (London, 1989), p. 19.

Franchise League. The leaders of these movements in Ireland were middle-class; daughters of clergymen (more often than not, non-conformist) and professionals, not titled gentlemen. The women in this sample had a mixed reaction to the suffrage and other campaigns which were running during this period. Gentry and aristocratic women were used to a certain degree of power in their locality, and had the wealth and family backing to enjoy some freedom of movement. Many of the women in this sample acted in a way that would be deemed political if carried out by middle-class women looking for the vote. They may not have joined in campaigns for suffrage, education or for the abolition of the CDAs, but they did organise committees and make speeches. A longer time span would be necessary to definitively answer whether this activity was owing to the victories of the various movements which gave legitimacy to women acting in the public sphere, or to the inherent superiority felt by members of the landed class. It would appear that while their inborn self-importance was significant, they were also affected by the social and political changes that took place during the period, though they themselves might not have looked for those changes.

The energies of the suffrage campaign were focused on the urban centres, with the notable exception of the Munster Women's Franchise League. The League was founded in 1911 from the dissolved branch of the Irish Women's Franchise League, with Edith Somerville as a not-very-active president.⁵²³ It was to be 'non-militant, non-sectarian, and non-party,' but had a conservative bent. The League had branches throughout Munster but was described by Cliona Murphy as 'a very genteel group with very little clout'.⁵²⁴ Another society which attracted some members of the landed class was the Conservative and Unionist Women's Suffrage Association which formed an Irish branch in 1909. The

⁵²³ Lewis, *Somerville*, p. 253.

⁵²⁴ C. Murphy, *Women's suffrage movement*, p. 25.

president was Lady Arnott, who was a friend of Lady Castletown.⁵²⁵ The members of this organisation were distinctly conservative, and were against universal adult suffrage.⁵²⁶

Only a few women in this sample committed their views on suffrage to paper. When Edward O'Brien claimed 'that women had no sense of honour,' his daughter Nelly defended her sex and 'gave it to him hot & strong!'⁵²⁷ Yet she did not crave equality, and repeated her belief that a man should be able to control his wife too often for it to be irony.⁵²⁸ Edward believed that 'women had much better keep out of politics', and while he felt his sister Charlotte Grace O'Brien's 'new fad' was 'perhaps a very useful one', he belittled her activity and wrote: 'She [Charlotte] is at her usual game of hero worship I fancy – at one time it was Gladstone – then Forster – then [?] – now Davitt.'⁵²⁹ Esther Grehan may have been in favour of suffrage, but her commitment was taken as something of a joke amongst the men in her family.⁵³⁰

Lady Carbery was most definitely anti-suffrage. She recorded her version of her meeting with 'a bitter creature who thinks women should have votes.' She presented herself as the steady voice of reason, and the suffragist as twisted by her own unnatural claims to behave in an unladylike manner and insult another:

"I'm sorry, I don't want a vote," I said politely.

"You wouldn't," she replied bitterly. "You're too pretty."⁵³¹

Katherine Everett shared this view, and writing in 1949, still believed that the democratic system of government 'is a bad one'.⁵³² She approved of some early feminist activity and had helped Beatrice Webb 'in a very small way with her minority report on the Poor Law'.

⁵²⁵ Ibid, p. 27.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ Ellen Lucy O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, 9 Oct. n.d. NLI/MS/36,779/3.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 20 Sept. 1900, NLI/MS/36,779/2 for example.

⁵²⁹ Edward O'Brien to Julia O'Brien, 17, 20 Mar. 1880, NLI/MS/36,758/1.

⁵³⁰ Charles Raleigh Chichester, 25 Mar. 1897, IE/BL/EP/G/711.

⁵³¹ Sandford (ed.), *West Cork Journal*, p. 121.

⁵³² Everett, *Bricks*, p. 282.

She met and 'liked Mrs Pankhurst [who was in hiding from police], and admired her brave and ardent spirit', but could not agree with her cause, or her methods. Everett told her: 'I think too many ill-informed people have the vote now...I don't want to double that ill-informed power by giving women the vote.'⁵³³ With such half-hearted commitment or outright hostility it is not surprising that so few women in Munster took advantage of new legislation which permitted them to stand for election as poor law guardians from 1896. Grehan was not willing to run for election. Instead she took part in the safer, less public option of joining a committee of 'ladies interested in the Kanturk workhouse' organised by Lady Mary Aldworth of Newmarket which inspected the food and conditions of the institution during the winter of 1896-97.⁵³⁴

In 1897, one year after the enactment of the Women's Poor law guardians (Ireland) Bill, twelve women country wide were already elected.⁵³⁵ By 1900 there were 'nearly one hundred,'⁵³⁶ ten of whom were in Munster. Virginia Crossman has argued that the low number of female guardians in the south and west was due to lower political activism among Munster and Connaught women, and Anna Haslam believed that women in rural areas were more likely to throw themselves into philanthropic activity than politics as they wanted practical results.⁵³⁷ Lady Castletown, the one woman in this sample who showed an interest in election in 1896, did so, not necessarily out of a desire for legal equality for women, but from a belief that, as the leading aristocrat in the area, she was the natural protector of the poor, and also as an effort to wrest power from the aspiring Catholic (and nationalist) middle class. If this was so, then she was representative of the majority of

⁵³³ Ibid., 268-70.

⁵³⁴ Esther Grehan, diary entry, 30 October, 10, 20 Nov., 18 Dec. 1896, IE/BL/EP/G/841 and 10 Mar. 1897, IE/BL/EP/G/842.

⁵³⁵ Annual report of the Women's suffrage and Poor law guardian Association, 1897.

⁵³⁶ Mary Cullen. "Anna Maria Haslam" in Cullen ed., *Women power and consciousness in nineteenth century Ireland*, (Dublin, 1995), p. 179.

⁵³⁷ V. Crossman, *Politics pauperism and power in late nineteenth century Ireland*, (Manchester, 2006); A. Haslam, 'Irish women and the local government franchise', *Englishwomen's Review*, 15 Oct. 1898.

elected female guardians who were both Protestant and unionist.⁵³⁸ In 1897, when there were just thirteen women acting as poor law guardians,⁵³⁹ Lady Castletown went as far as writing to Anna Haslam to request information on how best to go about securing election. Haslam's response demonstrated that Lady Castletown was not a committed member of the suffrage movement, and that the two women did not know each other personally. Haslam encouraged Castletown to attend a meeting of the Women's Suffrage Association, Dublin Committee, 'the proceedings of which might interest you.'⁵⁴⁰ If Lady Castletown had decided to row in behind Haslam, she would have been a valuable asset. She was a skilled political actor when she was interested in a subject.

Philanthropy

Further to the ad hoc activities described in Chapter One, women of the Munster landed class were also involved in public philanthropic organisations. Lady Castletown led the campaign to appoint a district nurse for Doneraile. A neighbour who was familiar with her personality and ability predicted: 'I am sure as you have taken up the halter you will succeed'.⁵⁴¹ The Queen's Institute was a voluntary, non-denominational body established in 1889, as a celebration of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee of 1887.⁵⁴² District nurses were a valuable asset to a community and were on-call at all times, except for 'a half day off a week and one month's leave a year.'⁵⁴³ The fundraising for the expense of the nurse was carried out by the local committee, which was 'composed of a classic stereotype of members...In the early years, district nursing associations were likely to have a

⁵³⁸ M. Dockrell, 'Irish women in local government', in Lady Aberdeen (ed), *Women in politics: the international congress of women, 1899* (London, 1900).

⁵³⁹ Anna Haslam, 'Irish women and the Local Government Act', *English Woman's Review*, 15 October 1898.

⁵⁴⁰ Anna Haslam to Lady Castletown 15th June 1896, NLI/MS/34,166 /7.

⁵⁴¹ Mr Evans, Carker House to Lady Castletown, Apr. 20 1906, NLI/MS/34,166/7.

⁵⁴² E. Prendergast and H. Sheridan, *Jubilee Nurse: voluntary district nursing in Ireland 1890-1974* (Dublin, 2012), pp. 94-5.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

predominantly female committee; the president was often a titled lady.⁵⁴⁴ The committee had to prove that they could support the district nurse in a permanent position.⁵⁴⁵ Lady Castletown used the Cahir association as a model for her own committee. In Cahir, the leading woman of the area, Lady Charteris, was president. Other members had the social advantage of sharing a committee, or at least donating to the same cause, as this woman. The society gave upper-class women an outlet for their artistic and organisational talents. The hardworking nurse, who made 2,599 visits in the year, was not named in the annual report of the Cahir society, but there was space to print all sixty-five subscribers.⁵⁴⁶

The Countess of Kenmare, the first president of the Council for all Ireland, had established a district nursing association in Killarney in 1899.⁵⁴⁷ Her friend and co-campaigner for the Miss Curtins, Lady Castletown methodically set about the task of securing a district nurse for Doneraile. She researched other associations and enlisted the assistance of the local doctor. Throughout 1906 she made enquiries and organised meetings. Many of those invited, and who eventually formed part of the committee, were friends, and their names appeared on a printed list of those invited to a garden party in Doneraile Court in September 1909.⁵⁴⁸ Lady Castletown was successful and Nurse Doyle, a twenty-three-year-old from Co. Armagh, was appointed in 1906.⁵⁴⁹ A report following inspection on 3rd May 1907 read: 'The work of the Association gives excellent promise. Nurse Doyle is much appreciated by her patients. The books and equipment are in very good order.'⁵⁵⁰ The annual report of the Doneraile branch for 1909 shows that Lady Castletown had taken up the position of president of the society, as befitted her position as

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 122., Theirs is the only study of Jubilee Nursing in Ireland. It sheds valuable light on the experiences of nurses and patients but has an uncritical outlook.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 128.

⁵⁴⁶ Cahir District Nursing Society Annual report, 1905, NLI/MS/34,166/7.

⁵⁴⁷ Prendergast and Sheridan, *Jubilee Nurse*, p. 113.

⁵⁴⁸ See correspondence and "List of invitations to Garden Party 1909", NLI/MS/34,166/7.

⁵⁴⁹ Nurse Doyle was still living in Doneraile in 1911, according to the census for that year.

http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Cork/Doneraile/Main_Street/429015/

⁵⁵⁰ NLI/MS/34,166/7.

one of only two titled women involved, the other being Lady Arnott.⁵⁵¹ This was one of the earlier associations, and some areas were still gaining their first Jubilee Nurse in the 1950s, with the average year of establishment being 1917.⁵⁵² Lady Castletown's initiative was important for the poor in the neighbourhood. She did not make any attempt to source a nurse for her Waterford estates, or her husband's estate in Co. Laois. While there is no doubting her genuine desire to alleviate suffering, this could be interpreted in a similar way to her clothing club discussed in the previous chapter. Such action could be seen as an attempt to preserve positive inter-class relations, and maintain the political status quo. Perhaps a testament to her importance in the association is the fact that the Doneraile and Shanballymore association ceased to exist in 1921, just a few years before her death.⁵⁵³

The women in this sample differed from the urban women discussed by Margaret Preston as they had no overtly religious aims in their work.⁵⁵⁴ Lady Monteagle donated money to the Protestant Orphan Society, and Lady Ardilaun bequeathed money to support the education of the children of Protestant ministers, but the one society in Munster which was founded by the women of this class was not proselytising.⁵⁵⁵ The County of Cork Needlework Guild (CNG) has slipped under the radar of previous studies of philanthropic organisations founded by women. It worked contrary to the assumptions made by these studies for two reasons. Firstly, it was an upper-class organisation, and secondly, it accepted both Protestant and Catholic members, and helped the poor of all denominations. It was founded in 1891 with the aim of encouraging 'Useful Work, and to distribute Articles of Clothing among the Hospitals, Charitable Institutions, and Poor Parishes of County and City of Cork', and groups were set up throughout the county. Doty, Countess Bandon, who was described as an eager 'caster-of-nets' by Lady Carbery, was

⁵⁵¹ "Report of the Doneraile Branch for year ending 31st August, 1909", NLI/MS/34,166/7.

⁵⁵² Prendergast and Sheridan, *Jubilee Nurse*, Appendix I, pp. 267-289.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁵⁵⁴ Preston, *Language of charity*.

⁵⁵⁵ Octavius Newry Knox, Account book detailing Lady Monteagle's Expenditure on Charity, P14 36; Will of Lady Ardilaun, IE/BL/EP/B/112.

patroness, and Lady Colthurst of Blarney Castle and Miss Perrott of St. Anne's Hall were honorary secretaries. The committee later expanded to include a treasurer and a third honorary secretary. The printed list of associates includes the names of many landed women from around the county, as well as some of the wealthier business families such as the Beamishes and Murphys.⁵⁵⁶ Maria Luddy has observed that 'All charities were sectarian in the sense that they were established on a religious basis and many dealt only with the destitute of their own persuasion'⁵⁵⁷. This was not true of the Needlework Guild, as it welcomed Protestant and Catholic members. Still there was a bizarre system of segregating members along religious lines, with a Protestant and a Catholic vice-president in each parish. Members were expected to make, rather than to buy articles of clothing and submit them to their Catholic or Protestant vice-president annually, so that two separate donations might be made from each parish. There was no animosity in this division, and there is one example of a Protestant taking over as Catholic vice-president when no one else volunteered for the position. The number of items donated by each vice-president was recorded in the annual report. In its inaugural year of 1891, the Guild donated 2,150 articles, and this rose to a peak of 6,428 in 1899⁵⁵⁸. These donations were not always of the most practical nature, a fact that frustrated the committee, as the second annual report illustrates:

the clothing is intended for the very poor, therefore, the plainer, stronger, and warmer it is, the more suitable for their requirements; some of the garments sent in were far too fine and elaborately trimmed, and there was rather too large a proportion of Bibs, Aprons, Babies' Boots, and Knitted Cuffs. .. Men's Flannel Shirts, Jackets and Comforters would be more acceptable.⁵⁵⁹

As late as 1896 it was still necessary to write:

⁵⁵⁶ Annual reports and minute book of the CNG, U196A 784.

⁵⁵⁷ Luddy, *Women and philanthropy in nineteenth century Ireland* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 6.

⁵⁵⁸ Annual report of the CNG, 1908, U196A 784.

⁵⁵⁹ Second annual report of the CNG, 1892, U196A 784.

Cuffs, Gloves, Mitts, and fine articles are not required, only strong warm clothing for the very poor. Babies Hoods, Boots, and Fancy Pinafores are useless.⁵⁶⁰

The minutes and annual reports often lamented that men and boys were badly catered for. This may have been because the associates had more expertise in making women's and babies' clothes, or perhaps they preferred the idea of helping a child in need rather than men, whom they may have perceived as less deserving. As Luddy has noted, 'women's charitable endeavours had always dealt primarily with the welfare of women and children.'⁵⁶¹ Another reason for the oversupply of 'fancy pinafores' may be that some women wanted to show that they could produce beautiful pieces, especially as the clothes would feature in a public exhibition, before being distributed to the poor. The *Cork Examiner* reported that the 1893 exhibition 'was inspected by a large number of visitors'.⁵⁶²

Undoubtedly, the Guild's activity benefited the needy to a degree, but it differed from many middle-class philanthropic organisations discussed by Luddy and Preston, in that there was little direct contact with the beneficiaries. In assisting the poor on the home estate, these women were helping people they knew by name, but when acting as part of an organisation, the beneficiaries were kept separate, as an anonymous group: 'the very poor'. The committee suggested that members use the local doctor, clergyman or relieving officer as intermediaries, and that enquiries towards charitable institutions could be made in writing.⁵⁶³ The fact that these women were not solely inspired by altruistic aims was illustrated when the committee cut all donations to the Soldiers and Sailors Association, despite requests for grants, because some guild members had left to join a new guild formed for the sole benefit of that association.⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶⁰ Annual report of the CNG, 1896, U196A 784.

⁵⁶¹ Luddy, *Women and philanthropy*, p. 212.

⁵⁶² *Cork Examiner*, October 26th 1893, minute book of the CNG, U196A 784.

⁵⁶³ Minutes, 11 September 1896, minute book of the CNG, U196A 784.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 21 and 27 October.

Membership of the Guild provided landed women with a sense of community and purpose, which culminated in the annual autumn exhibition of donations. The surviving minute book records the proceedings of the distributing committee, as well as Guild-wide meetings, which were held either in the Cork School of Art, or Blarney Castle, home to the secretary, Lady Colthurst.⁵⁶⁵ These meetings, together with the less formal group-level meetings, gave landed women an outlet for their organisational and managerial skills, outside of the family estate setting. It also provided a new opportunity to meet and work with other women from around the county in a purely female setting.

Like other organisations described and analysed by Luddy, the Guild was of short duration. It reflected the curve of enthusiasm it met with in the homes of the landed elite, as well as the lifespan of its more committed members. After the peak of 1899, donations dwindled, possibly owing to the deaths of some of the founding members. In 1909 contributions were below the 1893 level for the first time, and the secretaries were forced to buy clothes to maintain the level of earlier grants. The long-standing Honorary Secretary, Lady Colthurst, was deeply upset by the news and 'said that she would much prefer that the Guild be ended altogether if its contributions continued to diminish.'⁵⁶⁶ The last used page of the minute book reads, "Guild closed in Sept 1911 & is to be run in groups in Parishes if wished."⁵⁶⁷

Ladies Castletown and Colthurst appear to have gained gratification from seeing a successful project come through. Their rural activity did not question the social order, but sought to cement their position of social and economic dominance as much as it sought to alleviate the suffering of the deserving poor among the provincial population. Some women in the sample were also involved in the type of urban philanthropy described by Luddy, Preston and Walsh. This urban activity involved close contact with the poor. While

⁵⁶⁵ Annual report of the CNG, U196A 784.

⁵⁶⁶ Annual report of the CNG, 1909, U196A 784, (insert).

⁵⁶⁷ Minute book of the CNG, U196A 784.

living in Dublin, Nelly O'Brien became 'interested' in a tenement family, and materially helped them to arrange the burial of a family member on Christmas Eve, but she could not hide her belief that their misfortune was largely of their own doing:

the nominal breadwinner [was] in reality a drunken good for nothing dud [who died]... – 5 humans & a corpse living all that time on one room. Its [*sic*] no wonder that the Dublin death rate is over 40 as compared to 18 in London.... – I would have nothing to do with them for its [*sic*] through their own helplessness & idleness & is like pouring water into a sieve[,] only that the old grandmother about 70 who works here as charwoman is most honest & respectable & has slaved for the whole lot of them till she got ill herself[.] I went to see her today & found her without a stitch on the bed... If you heard the way I gave it to the daughter (the widow) you wouldn't think there was too much softness about me.⁵⁶⁸

Mabel O'Brien differed from other women in the sample, in that she grew up in Dublin city as the daughter of a successful doctor, and so was as closely linked to the urban middle-class, as she was to the rural landed-class.⁵⁶⁹ Philanthropic activity played an important part in her life before marriage. Her grandmother was the well-known philanthropist and proselytiser Ellen Smyly, who built up a network of schools and houses for poor and orphaned children in Dublin. Ellen Smyly's letters to her granddaughter demonstrate that such work demanded sharp organisational skills, and a thick skin; she discussed the decision to enrol Catholic students in the Protestant ethos schools, vandalism on the properties, and the never-ending search for donations.⁵⁷⁰ In line with more urban-based philanthropists, religion featured strongly in Ellen's correspondence and she reprimanded her twenty-six-year-old granddaughter severely for not observing the Sabbath in a suitable way, and suggested biblical passages for her to read.⁵⁷¹ Mabel, along with the other female members of her extended family, was involved in this family business of philanthropy, and Smyly seems to have given over the management of one school and a tea room to her.⁵⁷²

Mabel was defensive about this work, and shared her philanthropic philosophy, and sense

⁵⁶⁸ Ellen Lucy O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, 27 Dec. [1899] 36,779/3.

⁵⁶⁹ 'Sir Philip Crampton Smyly, M.D., DUH', Obituary Notices, *Journal of Laryngology, Rhinology and Otology*, Vol. XIX, No. 6, June 1904, pp. 286-7.

⁵⁷⁰ Ellen Smyly to Mabel O'Brien, NLI/MS36,784.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 5 Dec. 1896.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, 28 Dec. [n.d.], NLI/MS/36,785.

of moral superiority, with her fiancé when justifying the necessity of her attendance at a boys' carving class:

I go, and bring as much moral influence as I can along with me. The Boy's Home is one of the Irish Church Mission Schools of which I know a good many of your people disapprove. I forgivingly set it down to invincible ignorance on their part, but as I was greatly cheered to find that Canon O' Brien thought they were doing very good work. What I think about them is that they attack a difficulty which every other organisation leaves untouched and which is a very serious one. There is a horrible paralysis that comes over people in Dublin and makes them say that they are insurmountable difficulties in the way of every scheme that is brought forward to keep the poor....I would rather make mistakes than do nothing at all.⁵⁷³

Mabel also inherited a tradition of middle-class philanthropic activity from her maternal aunt by marriage, Anne Plunkett (née Guinness) who was a member of the famous brewing family, sister-in-law of Lady Ardilaun, and founding member of the School for Educating Daughters of the Irish Clergy, generally known as the Clergy Daughters' School (CDS). This charity facilitated the education of 'the impoverished female offspring of Church of Ireland Clerics'.⁵⁷⁴ Her fiancé, Dermot, did not approve of the extent of her philanthropic activity, and believed his wife should be preserving her energies for the home. He felt quite strongly on this matter and blamed her work with the CDS for making her look tired and worn:

You will soon become so rarified [*sic*] with good works that you will become a sort of guiding and inspiring spirit and that will be hard luck on such poor blind folk as myself who can't see ghosts and like to be able to see you...What call have you to be on a committee of Clergy Daughters, you can only be there on false pretences...If I had the heart to abuse you it would be because you evade me when I try to find out whether you aren't overdoing all these things. You don't even say you are as strong as a horse when I should have the opportunity of flatly contradicting you. You merely say that things take a lot of time and leave no trace when they are done, and that means nothing less than that. You have to be in a rush to keep going and a rush means weariness and you look it. It is not flattering I know, and you will say it is downright rude and that I have absolutely no right to say such a thing; but all the same I say it and this much more⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷³ Mabel O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, 24 Oct. 1901, NLI/MS/36,699/1.

⁵⁷⁴ O. Walsh, *Anglican women*, p. 53.

⁵⁷⁵ Dermot O'Brien to Mabel O'Brien, 24 Oct 1901, NLI/MS/36,694.

For Mabel, however, her various classes and committees filled her days, and gave her a sense of duty and purpose. Such activities allowed her to present herself as elusive and mysterious. In reading their correspondence over the course of their courtship, the decline in the number of references to Mabel's committee work is notable, although it does not prove that she had given it up. Perhaps she viewed these activities as part of her single life, and not to be continued once she was married. Ellen Smyly's schools were managed after her death by her two unmarried daughters. For both urban and rural women then, aside from the few driven by religious fervour, philanthropy served personal interests almost in equal measure to catering for the interests of the poor. Perhaps it was difficult to juggle the life of a landed woman with that of an upper-middle class philanthropist. This early work stood Mabel in good stead, however. After her marriage she had the organisational skills and business acumen to set up a cheese business, and also lectured on parenting practices. She transferred her talents from urban life to the family estate in Co. Limerick.

The political world

1860-1914 was a time of major political activism in Ireland. Not only were there international issues such as the Boer War and the First World War, but there were also the questions of Home Rule, republicanism, and cultural nationalism. This thesis is not the place to discuss such issues, however it is worth enquiring whether these women, living in rural Munster, were aware of, or interested in, such national and international political and military events. As seen in Chapter One, quite understandably, the Land League was perceived as a threat by these women and their class. Even though women generally did not own estates in their own right, they kept abreast of political developments, which affected landownership. With the exception of Charlotte Grace O'Brien, they did not get involved in direct political action, and their interest remained theoretical. Edward O'Brien assumed that his sister Charlotte did not read the newspaper herself, but told her to ask

another brother to show her an interesting article.⁵⁷⁶ It was the belief of Charlotte's nephew and biographer, Stephen Gwynn, that had she secured a husband and children of her own, she would never have embarked on her career of political campaigning.⁵⁷⁷ Edward shared his political views with both his first and his second wife. His first wife, Mary, copied extracts from his letters to create a document entitled; 'Experiences of a Unionist Irish landlord in the Fenian Rising 1867'.⁵⁷⁸ Their daughter, Nelly O'Brien, a close contemporary of Esther Grehan, but who lived twenty years longer, was well versed in political matters. She kept her brother, the heir, informed of rent strikes on the estate, and their father's attempts at unifying landlords against their common foe.⁵⁷⁹ Her interest in politics seems to have increased with the escalating political fervour in Ireland at the turn of the century. As with her criticism of art, she informed herself before making an opinion. She dithered for and against nationalism, depending on the behaviour of its leaders, but eventually became a firm nationalist. During the 1880s she thought her aunt, Charlotte Grace O'Brien, was a bit ridiculous in writing poems dedicated to Gladstone, and writing him a letter on his birthday,⁵⁸⁰ but by 1901 she clashed with her brother Dermot, who was heir to the estate, over the validity of the landlord system in Ireland. His exasperated letter to his fiancé demonstrates that he felt he could assume that she shared his Unionist views:

I think Nelly is the most inconsistent of women. This morning after breakfast she gave a long lecture on Irish politics Home Rule & so forth whereat we fought much & long and having made it quite clear that I belonged to a worthless idle class, this after an hour or so, fell to [?] me roundly for wasting my time instead of marking trees. I was then sent out & wandered through the plantation marking trees & stripping landlords off them, I mean ivy of course being equally parasitic & ornamental.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁶ Edward O'Brien to Charlotte Grace O'Brien, 14 Mar. n.d., NLI/MS/36,750/1.

⁵⁷⁷ S. Gwynn, *Memoir*, p. 43-44.

⁵⁷⁸ Mary O'Brien (ed.), 'Experiences of a unionist Irish landlord in the Fenian Rising 1867', NLI/MS/36,755.

⁵⁷⁹ Ellen Lucy O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, NLI/MS/36,779.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 9 Jan. 1887, NLI/MS/36,779/1.

⁵⁸¹ Dermot O'Brien to Mabel O'Brien, Oct. 1901, NLI/MS/36,694/1.

Nelly was a founding member of the Gaelic League, and a friend of Douglas Hyde.⁵⁸²

She and her brother also differed over their views on the Boer War. She devoted space in her letters to the debate, and thought it was ‘a wicked war’ (emphasis original) and felt ‘Chamberlain is almost a criminal. One can’t say much here though or one would be put down as one of them [*sic*] despicable discredited nationalists.’⁵⁸³ She thought Dermot was ‘happy indeed to be able to believe that the cause is worthy of all these sacrifices.’⁵⁸⁴ As the First World War approached, women devoted more attention to politics. Lady Castletown made her admirer, Percy La Touche, devote his letters to the discussion of politics, and Arethusa Leigh White extended dinner and lunch invitations to the officer corps of the navy stationed at nearby Bearhaven, while Lady Inchiquin asked her husband to send on the papers daily to her summer home, to keep her informed of the latest developments.⁵⁸⁵ Even if these women’s letters and diary entries rarely mentioned political subjects, they were closely connected to the world outside their homes.

Conclusion

In the public arena, these women’s freedoms were, of course, curtailed – by today’s standards. In their own minds, however, they were largely content with their lot. Aside from a few unfortunate cases, the women were hardly less physically active than their male relatives. Nelly O’Brien never received the artistic training of her brother, but her brother had to fight to be allowed that education by his father. Nelly chose to support her ‘darling’ little brother in this campaign. While she yearned to live some of his experiences, she had no desire to step outside the norms of her class and gender. What is noteworthy is that by living within the confines of respectability during a period of such official oppression of women, they could lead what they perceived, as fulfilling and varied lives. They did not

⁵⁸² T. Snoddy, *Dictionary of Irish artists*, p. 463.

⁵⁸³ Ellen Lucy O’Brien to Dermot O’Brien, 12 Nov [1899] NLI/MS/36,779/2.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 27 Dec. [1899].

⁵⁸⁵ Ethel, Lady Inchiquin to 14th Baron Inchiquin 21, [23] Sept. [1914], NLI/MS/45,504.

enter professions or the army, and their lives were largely spent in the homes of their family and friends. But these homes were also places of work, albeit not generally paid labour, but voluntary and artistic endeavours. It was from these homes that women kept in touch with political and artistic movements, and held the meetings of philanthropic organisations. Such houses were spread throughout the United Kingdom, and so it was entirely acceptable, and necessary, for women to make numerous journeys, both within Ireland and across the Irish Sea, if they were to keep up with their network of friends and family. Two letters from Percy La Touche to his mistress Lady Castletown demonstrate that to be female was not, necessarily, to be shy and retiring, and to be male did not mean that one was free from the authority of one's family. He bemoaned his wasted life:

No vestige of happiness can ever come into my life except from you...on the few occasions on which I have tried to get up from my squalid couch I have always been thrown down again – away back in the seventies when I was asked to stand for the county & could have got in, my parent would not permit me & of course I had no means of my own...then when I wanted to go to British Columbia all the family made such a fuss that I was not strong enough to withstand itI dread that I should some day wither beneath the sense of your contemptuous disappointment.⁵⁸⁶

Percy's professed aim in life was to spend the day with Lady Castletown 'somewhere up the river with a boat', but he knew she would 'smile at the very notion of such a rococo idea', because she was always "'on the rush'" with her busy 'London life'.⁵⁸⁷ The independence of Lady Castletown, and the dependence of La Touche suggest that relations between men and women among the landed elite were not necessarily characterised by male dominance and female deference. The next chapter will analyse the marital and romantic relationships of these women.

⁵⁸⁶ Percy La Touche to Lady Castletown, 5 Dec. n.d. [early twentieth century], R4, Bisbrooke Hall Papers.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 11 May [1897].



Fig. 17: Henry Tonks, *Summer*, 1908, Oil on canvas, Tate N04565 <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/tonks-summer-n04565> accessed on 22 Aug. 2013.



Fig. 18: William Orpen, *Herbert Barnard John Everett*, 1877-1949, c.1900, oil on canvas, 965 x 915 mm, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. <http://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/14158.html> accessed on 22 Aug. 2013.



Fig. 19: Mary Herbert, *Muckross Abbey*, c.1860, Watercolour. Muckross House, http://www.muckross-house.ie/gallery_mary_herbert_01.html accessed on 22 Aug.



Fig 20: Mary Herbert, *Gap of Dunloe*, c.1860. Muckross House, <http://www.muckross-house.ie/research-library.html>



Fig. 21: Mary Herbert, *Trees near Wiesbaden*, n.d. Muckross House, <http://www.muckross-house.ie/research-library.html> accessed on 22 Aug. 2013.



Fig. 22: Mary Herbert, *View near Naples*, 1846, Muckross House <http://www.muckross-house.ie/research-library.html> accessed on 22 Aug. 2013.



Fig. 23: Mary O'Brien, pen and ink on paper. Pre-1868, NLI/MS/36,809.



Fig. 24: Mary O'Brien, pen and ink on card, pre-1868, NLI/MS/36,809

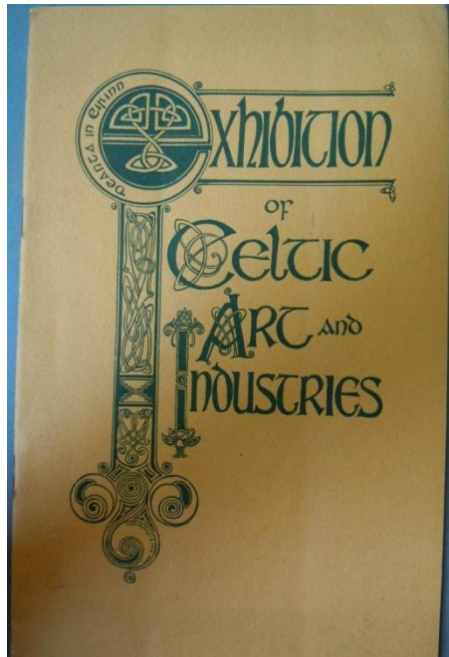


Fig 25: Programme of the Exhibition of Celtic Art and Industries which Nelly O'Brien brought to America [1914]
NLI/MS 36,905



Fig 26: Nelly O'Brien pictured in the above programme. She is wearing her traditional dress, which she wore all the time while in America. She is possible wearing an Inghinidhe ne hEireann brooch. c.1914

NLI/MS 36,905

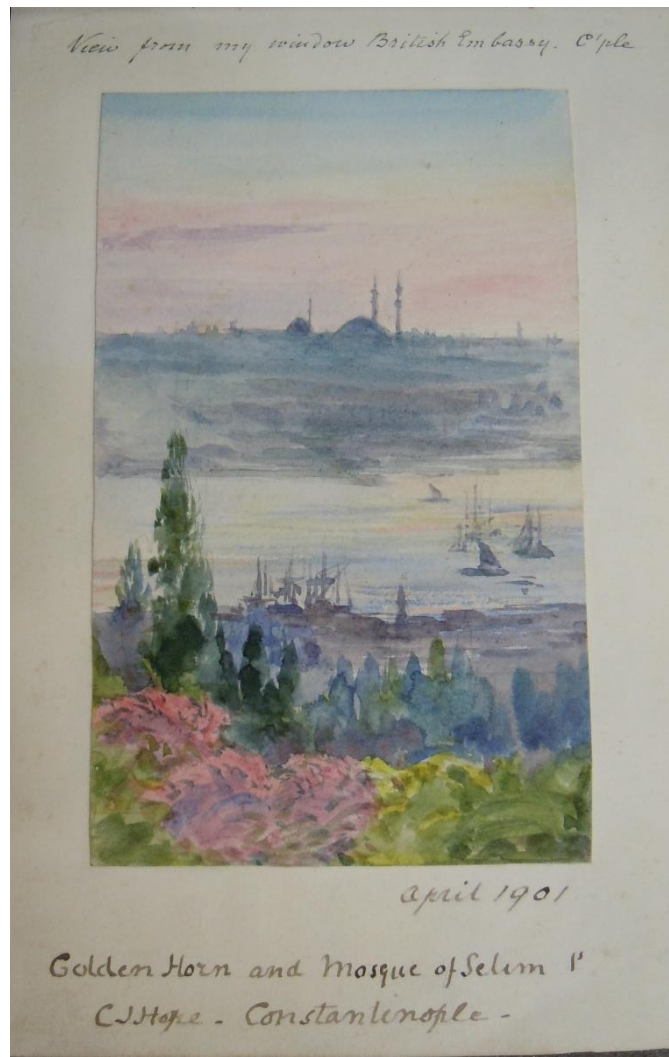


Fig. 27: watercolour sketch pasted into Christine Chichester autograph book.



A Foggy Flirtation.

Jan: 22nd 1889

We saw from the Hill, when the Fog had uplifted,
A Youth and a Matron, suspiciously placed,
The Youth, with that ardour with which youths are gifted
With his arm was encircling the Motherly waist.

When Boys are enamoured, and Ladies are silly,
I were better that they and their deeds were inco
So let them remember Kildare is too hilly,
To shield this Manoeuvres when next there's a

Fig. 28: 'A Foggy Flirtation', poem pasted into Lady Castletown's scrapbook, NLI/MS/3079.



Fig 29: Sketch posted in Lady Castletown's scrapbook, NLI/MS/3079.

Chapter 3: Marriage and Love

Introduction

To have and to hold from this day forward
For better for worse,
For richer for poorer,
In sickness and in health,
To love, cherish, and to obey,
Till death us do part,
According to God's holy ordinance;
And thereto give thee my troth.

...I do truly believe that we are each God's gift to each other, though why so great a gift should come to me I cannot understand, and if in days to come he sends us other blessings [children] the greater will be our thankfulness to Him and the stronger the bond between us. Dear Love, your nature is much fuller and nobler than mine, I like to lose myself in it and would rather be a little bit of your empire than a small independent province of my own. It is hard to argue about what cannot be. If you wanted me to do what I thought was wrong you would come upon the Puritan rock in me which cannot move, but as I know you never would and my trust in you is absolute, I cannot see how the question would arise... I think we shall keep our clouds of glory to the very end D[ermod] come what come may. I don't see why it should fade into the light of common day with either of us. Life is full of beauty and mystery [,] and love will show us more wonderful things everyday and if sorrow comes to us, as I suppose it must, still it will be something to share, to live through together; and if death comes it will only be the letting down of the veil again for a little while between us and we shall each know that the other is nearby. I am afraid I don't want to go to any heaven before you though D[ermod]. I am well content with the share that has been given to us now. We must both fight the good fight together and I must be a help and not a hindrance to your strong arm. I should like to heap blessings on you and fill every day and every hour of your life with happiness.
Your Wife⁵⁸⁸

This extract, from a letter written by Mabel O'Brien, the fiancée of Dermot

O'Brien, heir to the Cahirmoyle estate in Co. Limerick, contains some of the contradictions which encapsulated marriage and love for the women of this class during the period c.1860-1914. It is written by a woman who considered herself in love, indeed felt herself and her fiancé to be more in love than other couples, and was confident that this love

⁵⁸⁸ Mabel O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, 16 Dec. 1901, NLI/MS/36,699/1. They were engaged in December 1901, and married in March 1902.

would last throughout their lives. Mabel hoped that she would fulfil her duty and give him children to inherit his estate. The language used by Mabel was submissive, but it was not oppressed. She bowed to his 'nobler' nature and did not want to be independent of him. Yet, she asserted that he would be powerless to make her do what she 'thought was wrong', which could be interpreted as anything she did not want to do. Legally, a man was head of his household, but as Chapters One and Two have demonstrated, it was rare for a wife to be heavily curtailed in her freedoms. Mabel believed that instead of curtailing her freedoms, marriage would give her greater autonomy of thought and expression. In a later letter she wrote of her expectation that, once married:

I shall be more of an identity, more myself from being part of you. Whether it is from character or circumstances I can't say, probably from a certain indolence of character, I have all my life submitted more or less, rather more than less, to other people's stronger wills and views, partly from a sense of duty, partly from policy, partly because it seemed too much trouble to resist, and partly I think because I find it very difficult to put my feelings into words. With you I think it will be different because I feel you don't only want to make me a shadow of yourself but to bring out what is in me, good or bad, and make the best of it. My tendency is towards repression and shrinking into a shell, but I always feel as if you were drawing me out and making me expand.⁵⁸⁹

The marriage of Mabel and Dermot was contracted relatively late in both of their lives. She was thirty-three and he thirty-seven.⁵⁹⁰ Marriage was an attractive option for women. Of the forty-nine daughters in this sample who were known to live beyond the age of seventeen, thirty-five, or seventy-one percent married during the time span of the study.

⁵⁹¹ As demonstrated in Chapter one, the marriages contracted by this class required a degree of compatibility between partners, if they were to be successful. Mabel and Dermot were well-matched with shared interests, a similar economic background, and a

⁵⁸⁹ Mabel O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, 22 Jan. 1902, NLI/MS/36,699/2.

⁵⁹⁰ 'Inchiquin' *Burke's peerage* Residents of a house 4 in Merrion Square North (Trinity, Dublin) http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Dublin/Trinity/Merrion_Square_North/1311539/ accessed on 28 August 2013.

⁵⁹¹ Table 1.

strong physical attraction – he went so far as to address her as ‘the best of wives (as far as I know them).’⁵⁹²

Table 1: Rate of marriage among daughters of Munster landlords, 1858-1914⁵⁹³

	Total daughters born	Total known to live past age 17 (of total born)		Total of these known to marry (of adult women)		Total of these known to remain single (of adult women)		Total of these unknown (of adult women)	
Peerage	43	34	80%	25	74%	4	12%	5	15%
Commoner	21	15	83%	10	67%	3	20%	2	13%
Total	64	49	77%	35	71%	7	14%	7	14%

A note on the legal status of married women

By the time Mabel and Dermot married, the law dictated that she could continue to own her own property after marriage, but in the early years of the period under review, married women were reduced ‘to a subordinate and dependent legal status, deprived of the legal rights and responsibilities of men and unmarried women...the status of wife...entailed severe legal disabilities.’⁵⁹⁴ Upon marriage, a woman became a *femme covert* as opposed to the *femme sole* status of her single or widowed years. A *femme covert* was literally covered by her husband in the eyes of the law. She could own nothing of her own, nor could a crime be committed directly against her; it was perpetrated against her husband. Sir William Blackstone had put it simply; ‘In law husband and wife are one person, and the husband is that person.’⁵⁹⁵

However, wealthy women and their families were able to circumvent the law through marriage settlements. These arranged for the wife’s separate property to be placed in trust, away from the reach of an avaricious husband. Therefore, the Married

⁵⁹² Dermot O’Brien to Mabel O’Brien, 28 Oct. 1902, MS/36,694/10.

⁵⁹³ Source: *Burke’s Peerage, Burke’s Landed Gentry*. Thanks to Andy Bielenberg for discussing population history, fertility history, and the use of spreadsheets. We have discussed possible ways of increasing the number of knowns in a larger study, and how to select a larger sample, but none were possible for this project. Thanks to Dave O’Hanlon for demonstrating SPSS.

⁵⁹⁴ L. Holcombe, *Wives and property: reform of the Married Women’s Property Law in nineteenth-century England* (Oxford, 1983).

⁵⁹⁵ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Women's Property Acts of 1870, 1874 and 1882 had less of an impact on the lives of the women in this study than on the lives of factory workers or shopkeepers. Deborah Wilson has analysed the relationship between women, marriage and property in Ireland, albeit for an earlier period. She has found that as a result of the provisions (relating to pin money, separate estate, and jointure) made for women in their marriage settlement, 'Women from wealthy landed families were ... spared some of the financial disadvantages inherent in the subordinate position accorded to women by law.'⁵⁹⁶ So, while the act was argued to be 'the most important of all the legal reforms won by feminists in the nineteenth century,' it did not have a great impact on the women of this class, as it gained for the majority of women the privileges of the few who could already afford complex marriage settlements.⁵⁹⁷

Women in this sample made wills even while the common law system of *coverture* was in place. In 1868, Elizabeth Lenox Conyngham, the mother of the Viscountess Doneraile, was able to bequeath the 'whole' of her property, with the exception of a few annuities to servants, to her daughter 'for her sole and separate use'.⁵⁹⁸ The Viscount was still living, so this will was entirely circumventing the law as it then stood. With such complex provisions made for the women of this class, it is hardly surprising that Esther Grehan, the first woman in this sample to marry after the 1882 Act came into law on 1 January 1883, did not seem to be aware of the new autonomy she now, by law, possessed, as is clear in a letter she wrote to her fiancé:

I don't think I answered the business question properly – but I don't know much about it – I believe that I am free to do what I like with the little I have[,] make ducks and drakes of it – So of course you will be able to invest it in any thing[sic] you like. I presume it can no longer be put in my name – but you will see about all that.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁶ Wilson, *Women, marriage and property*, p. 8.

⁵⁹⁷ Holcombe, *Wives and property*, pp. 3, 202.

⁵⁹⁸ Will of Elizabeth Lenox Conyngham, 10 Apr. 1868, NLI/MS/34,140/18.

⁵⁹⁹ Esther Chichester to Stephen Grehan, 1 Dec. 1883, IE/BL/EP/G/690.

As a result of the 1882 Act, all women could hold property separately from their husbands, and they could both inherit and bequeath their own property as they saw fit.

Choosing a partner

Who they married

David Cannadine's description of the British and Irish gentry and aristocracy as a 'supra-national elite' is upheld by an examination of the marriage patterns among these families. While the Irish landed class felt abandoned, politically, by their English cousins in relation to the Land War and the Home Rule bills, personally, they continued to make new familial links across the Irish Sea. It is difficult to comprehend how British politicians could talk about 'the Irish landlord' as a foreign creature. In this sample at least, successive generations of women found a marriage partner across the Irish Sea. Terence Dooley was correct when he concluded that, while the trend observed by Edith Somerville to "'love thy neighbour – or, at all events to marry her"...was perceptible, it would be too simplistic to put it down to geographical convenience...The maintenance of social status was more pressing.'⁶⁰⁰ It was important for an heir to choose a suitable wife who hailed from a similar background, so that she would be well versed in the duties outlined in Chapter one. The pool of potential matches was therefore relatively small. Dooley has noted a trend among powerful Irish peers to marry the daughters of peers resident in Britain. Sixty percent of the peers, in his study of a total of 159, married the daughters of other peers, 'almost three quarters of whom were English.'⁶⁰¹ In my sample, commoners and peers alike were less inclined to choose a wife from the landed elite of their own county, but preferred a wife who hailed from another part of Ireland, or from England, demonstrating the degree of integration for the landed class living throughout the British Isles.⁶⁰²

⁶⁰⁰ Edith Somerville and Martin Ross, *Irish memories* (London and New York, 1925), p. 71 quoted in Dooley, *Decline*, p. 64 and Dooley p. 65.

⁶⁰¹ Dooley, *Decline*, p. 67. Fifty-one percent of peers in Campbell's sample married the daughters of peers, p. 22.

⁶⁰² Table 3.

Table 2: Known destination of daughters of Munster landlords on marriage, 1858-1914

	To England	Ireland outside county of origin	County of Origin
Daughter of peer	12	2	4
Daughter of commoner	2	2	1
Total marriage destinations	14 (61% of known)	4 (17% of known)	5 (22% of known)

Source: *Burke's Peerage*, *Burke's Landed Gentry*, Bateman, *Great Landowners*.

Table 3: Munster landlord's wives' origin on marriage, 1858-1914

	From England		From Ireland outside county of marital residence		From county of marital residence		Unknown origin	
Wife of peer	4	57%	2	29%	1	14%	0	0
Wife of commoner	3	43%	6	50%	2	17%	1	8%
Total	7	37%	8	42%	3	16%	1	5%

Source: *Burke's Peerage*, *Burke's Landed Gentry*, Bateman, *Great Landowners*.

The women of this class were more likely to marry someone from outside their own county. Twelve of these peers' daughters whose destination on marriage is known, moved to England, while only half that number married a man who lived in Ireland.⁶⁰³ Men and women tended to marry a partner of a similar age. Only two wives in this sample were known to be older than their husbands, and then only by a couple of years, and three women were six to ten years younger than their spouses.⁶⁰⁴

Table 4: Scale of age difference in sample marriages, 1858-1914

	Wife 1-5 years older	Wife = Husband	Wife 1-5 years	Wife 6-10 years	Wife > ten years	Total wives younger
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⁶⁰³ Table 2.

⁶⁰⁴ Table 4.

			younger	younger	younger	
Marriage of Munster landlord	1	1	4	1	1	6 (75%)
Marriage of daughter	1	1	2	2	2	6 (75%)
Total marriages	2 (13%)	2 (13%)	6 (38%)	3 (19%)	3 (19%)	12 (75%)

Source: *Burke's Peerage, Burke's Landed Gentry*. Census, 1911.

Members of the landed elite were not confined to marrying the heirs or daughters of landlords, however. Terence Dooley's assertion that 'Marriage was regarded as an important means of regenerating the tightly knit, exclusive nature of their community' is only partly true.⁶⁰⁵ A sizeable minority, forty-one percent of landlords and thirty-eight percent of their daughters, for whom the relevant information is available, married someone who was not directly connected to a landed estate.⁶⁰⁶ Mabel O'Brien was one such spouse. Her mother was a daughter of the landed class, and her father would be knighted, so she was appropriately elite. These findings support Amanda Vickery's claim that the landed gentry (and the aristocracy) were not an isolated elite, but held numerous familial links with other wealth elites.⁶⁰⁷ That is not to say that women stooped awfully low when looking for their marriage partners; the working men who married the daughters of landlords were from a small set of genteel professions, from the worlds of religion, the arts, the civil service or the military, rather than that of commerce. Such professions were popular among the younger sons and grandsons of landlords, so it was likely that these men would share their wives' background and outlook. For example, Edward O'Brien was 'somewhat taken aback by the apparently sudden resolve' of his sister-in-law, Lucy Spring-Rice, to marry her family estate agent, Octavius Newry Knox, but this was not a tale of romance across the classes; Knox was a grandson of the first Earl of Ranfurly, and worked in

⁶⁰⁵ Dooley, *Decline*, p. 68.

⁶⁰⁶ See tables 5 and 6.

⁶⁰⁷ Vickery, Appendix 1, *Gentleman's daughter*, p. 352; Thompson, *English landed society*, pp. 20-21; L. Davidoff, *The best circles*, p. 49.

a perfectly suitable profession for younger sons and grandsons of landlords.⁶⁰⁸ That so many young women made eminently suitable matches implies that they were well aware of the practical side of marriage. They were born and educated into the class, and were conscious of the benefits of marrying within it. As Judith Schneid-Lewis has observed for an earlier period: even when daughters of the British aristocracy married someone who was not their parents' preferred suitor, they still chose from within 'a remarkably circumscribed social sphere.'⁶⁰⁹

Table 5: Daughters' destination on marriage by husband's occupation, 1858-1914

	Landlord (peer or commoner)		Military		Clergy		Other		Unknown partner	
Daughter of peer	12	30%	1	2%	4	9%	3	7%	16	25%
Daughter of landlord (commoner)	4	20%	1	5%	0	0%	1	5%	11	17%
Total daughters	16	25%	2	3%	4	6%	4	6%	27	42%

Source: *Burke's Peerage, Burke's Landed Gentry*.

Table 6: Munster landlords' wives' origin on marriage by fathers' occupation, 1858-1914

	Daughter of landlord (commoner or peer)		Daughter of military		Daughter of clergy		Daughter of politician		Daughter of other		Daughter of unknown occupation	
Total wives (19)	10	53%	2	11%	2	11%	2	11%	1	5%	2	11%

Source: *Burke's Peerage, Burke's Landed Gentry*.

Mercenary considerations

The reason for this narrow pool was, quite simply, money. An economically sound marriage could lead to a life of comfort and increased prestige. Marriage was, in essence, a business transaction. An heir's successful marriage offered an injection of money into a potentially cash-poor estate, or might even allow him to gain control of another estate, if he was lucky

⁶⁰⁸ Edward O'Brien to Ellen Mary Frere, April 1866, NLI/MS/36,754.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

enough to win an heiress. A daughter's successful marriage allowed her to become mistress of her own establishment, preferably a larger and more aristocratic one than the home of her mother. Lady Selbourne advised her son in 1909 to 'fall in love with your head as well as with your heart.'⁶¹⁰ The daughters of the class were no less likely to follow such advice, as the financial side of marriage was of paramount importance to these women, who would never have a professional career.

During the 1880s and 1890s a number of Nelly and Dermot O'Brien's mutual friends were married. Nelly took a great interest in the future financial situation of her acquaintances. She was happy that Kitty Leshington was engaged to the future Earl of Carlisle because it was 'a splendid match for her from a worldly point of view.'⁶¹¹ A less worldly successful pairing was that of her cousin, May Gwynn, who was to

have about £500 a year & take in boarders to be crammed – 3 young men at the worst sort of age. May doesn't like the prospect at all. I think her housekeeping will be funny at first [;] her talents don't lie in that direction.⁶¹²

May Gwynn's mother, Lucy, had married a clergyman and had a large family. It would have been difficult then for May, as the daughter of a rector, to have made a socially glittering match. Marriage was not an end in itself; it was only worthy when matched by the requisite funds. Nelly hoped that there was 'some mistake' about the news of Katherine Everett's intended marriage, 'as she seems to be selling down'.⁶¹³ When Nelly herself, who was the eldest daughter of a landlord, was courted by a Mr. Montgomery she wanted to put an end to it as quickly as possible. She believed that 'as he is absolutely poor it's [a] silly not to say unmanly sort of business'.⁶¹⁴ Nelly would not consider a marriage which would mean joining an unacceptably impoverished family, even at, what was then considered, the

⁶¹⁰ Jalland, *marriage and politics*, p. 75.

⁶¹¹ Nelly O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, 3 Feb. 1887, NLI/MS/36,779/1.

⁶¹² Ibid., 7 Nov. 1889, NLI/MS/36,779/1.

⁶¹³ Ibid., 9 April 1899 NLI/MS/36,779/2. It is not entirely clear whether Nelly worried about Everett's financial situation, or whether she was referring to the comparable artistic ability of the intended spouses.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., 29 Jan [1901], NLI/MS/36,779/2.

relatively old age of thirty-seven. She would have disappointed the Victorian social commentator William Rathbone Greg who criticised single women for refusing offers of marriage that ‘would entail a sacrifice of that “position” which they valued more than the attractions of domestic life.’⁶¹⁵

Dooley believes that dowries were a ‘prime consideration’ in marriage.⁶¹⁶ This was true for heirs to estates, but potential husbands and their families equally had to impress the bride, and her family, with their wealth and position in society. Lady Carbery recounted her version of the comical interview between her English grandfathers and father, which must have taken place in the 1850s or 60s:

“‘Well young man,” said Philip Wroughton, “how do you propose to support my daughter?” ...Harry looked respectfully at his father who made the first move as in chess. The fathers talked alternately, making offers and counter offers. As it is bad manners to mention money, I can’t tell you what they said.

The game proceeded. From present intentions they moved to the future and discussed one another’s deaths in a friendly spirit, thinking only of their children’s good.

‘Harry will have Childwick when I die.’ This was Mr. T.’s last move. Checkmate.’⁶¹⁷

When Egerton, the wealthy but untitled heir to the Leigh estates in Cheshire, proposed to Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of the 3rd Earl and Countess Bantry, in 1874, almost all of the running was done by his side. In correspondence with the Bantrys, Egertons’s father, Col. Egerton Leigh, listed all the estates, including ‘High Leigh the cradle of my family’ which his son would inherit upon his death, as well as the annual rental, and any financial drains upon them.⁶¹⁸ Earl Bantry planned to give his daughter £10,000 immediately, which was

⁶¹⁵ William Rathbone Greg, *Why are women redundant?* (London, 1869), p. 19.

⁶¹⁶ Dooley, *Decline*, p. 69.

⁶¹⁷ Carbery, *Happy world*, 9-10.

⁶¹⁸ Col. Egerton Leigh to 3rd Earl Bantry, 7 May 1874, Col. Egerton Leigh to Countess Bantry, 7 May 1874, IE/BL/EP/G/2341.

the minimum standard settlement for marriages at this elite level of society.⁶¹⁹ He vaguely wrote:

s [houl]d I be spared to add to this amount by will etc etc – In the mean while the income of the young people I fear is rather straightened [*sic*] & with [?] Daughters unprovided for it will not be in my power to increase this amount. Should you think fit to do so, no doubt it would be much to their advantage & comfort.⁶²⁰

With such pressure applied, Leigh consented to increase the allowance he would give the new couple by two hundred pounds to £1,200 per annum, as he would 'be sorry to think that any comfort I could afford them they should not have.'⁶²¹ Elizabeth's fiancé also thought it necessary to write to her mother and sister to win their approval for the match. That the groom and his family were willing to supplicate in this manner suggests that a suitable wife was highly valued. Egerton Leigh was well aware that he had made a socially advantageous match.⁶²²

Lady Elizabeth's attraction (aside from her looks and personality) was her connection to the peerage. She was well aware of the value of a title in the marriage market. Her father inherited the earldom from his brother, who died when Elizabeth, the eldest, was sixteen. She knew that such an 'elevated position' would increase their chances of marrying well, but felt guilty for getting excited 'far too soon.'⁶²³ Technically, she was marrying down, by not marrying a man of equal social standing to her father. But while the Leighs were not members of the peerage, they were financially stable, and in marrying the heir, rather than a younger son, it was a profitable decision for her and her prospective children.

⁶¹⁹ Wilson, *marriage and property*, p. 50. This would amount to nearly three quarter of a million pounds sterling in today's terms, House of Commons research paper 02/44, 11 July 2002, references in E. Kehoe, *Fortune's daughters, the extravagant lives of the Jerome sisters: Jennie Churchill, Clara Frewen and Leonie Leslie* (London, 2004), p. 387.

⁶²⁰ 3rd Earl Bantry to Col. Leigh, 9 May 1874 IE/BL/EP/G/2341.

⁶²¹ Col. Leigh to 3rd Earl Bantry, 13 May 1874 IE/BL/EP/G/2341

⁶²² Egerton Leigh to Earl Bantry and Lady Ina White, [May 1874], IE/BL/EP/B/2565.

⁶²³ Elizabeth White, Journal, BL/EP/B/2458.

It was a common occurrence for women in this class to marry a man who, according to the property listed in Bateman's *Landowners*, was less well off than their fathers, or who lacked a comparable title. Of the twenty-one women who married Munster landlords in this sample, and whose fathers' wealth was also listed in *Bateman*, fourteen, or seventy-four per cent, moved to a family of a lower estate valuation, while only five enjoyed an increased value. When one takes into consideration the likelihood that women who married clergymen or military men, not to mention land agents or school inspectors, also experienced a drop in family income, the trend becomes even more apparent. However, in marriage, women gained greater access to the family fortune as they became an active partner rather than a dependant daughter.

Ethel Foster was the daughter of a wealthy mill owner, who also owned a landed estate in Shropshire. As co-heiress to his vast fortune, and despite any connections to commerce, she was in a position to marry into an aristocratic family in 1896. The press coverage surrounding her marriage to Lucius O'Brien, the heir to the Inchiquin baronetcy of Co. Clare, emphasised two things: his distinguished family background, and claimed descent from Brian Boru, high king of Ireland in the eleventh century, and her extremely large fortune.⁶²⁴ This wealth was invaluable to her husband, as Ethel's birth family home and estate, Moor Park, in Shropshire, was eventually sold to save the Inchiquin seat of Dromoland from creditors.⁶²⁵ Ethel also gained socially from the transaction, and her sister was quite delighted to think that Ethel could now bear the title of 'Hon.' before her name.⁶²⁶ Such unashamed transfer of money for title was deemed commonplace among

⁶²⁴ *Ladies Pictorial, Black and White, The Queen*, 'Marriage Supplement' in *The Court Journal and Fashionable Gazetteer*, all 18 Jan. 1896, and other assorted news clippings NLI/MS/45,527.

⁶²⁵ It had been common practice for a marriage portion to be used to clear the estate debts of the bridegroom's family. Wilson, *Marriage and property*, p. 33.

⁶²⁶ (Her father-in-law was still living, so she would be styled as 'Lady Inchiquin' until his death in 1900).

the elite of society.⁶²⁷ Another early nineteenth-century Irish peer and landowner, Arthur Hill, Marquess of Downshire, saw a large fortune as the surest way of securing a good marriage, and so personal happiness, for his daughters. For this reason he left more money to his daughters than to his sons in his will:

My boys will serve their country and have many ways of providing for themselves and as the dear girls have not such opportunities but must patiently wait the caprice of love, or perhaps the avarice of some man to obtain a settlement.⁶²⁸

Families sought to ensure their daughters' comfort by securing a beneficial marriage contract which would protect the woman's assets by ensuring that a minimum amount would be settled on her annually during her husband's life and throughout her widowhood, should she survive him.⁶²⁹ Such settlements also set aside money for the expected children of the union. They could be lengthy documents, and the marriage settlement of Lord and Lady Castletown stretched to sixty-eight large sheets of tightly written vellum. It listed all the townlands of their estates, and the leases that existed on such estates, as well as provisions for each partner in the event of the other's death, and the various plans for the estates dependent on the number, and sex, of the children who might survive them.⁶³⁰ Such convoluted proceedings highlight the extent to which parties put the needs of the family estate first when contemplating marriage.

Minimum annuities and jointures were set down in settlements, but these could be added to by will depending on the health of estate finances, and the nature of the marriage relationship. In 1866, Viscount Doneraile amended his will to add an annuity of £2,000 to his wife's already large jointure of £1,200. In 1885, he went even further and bequeathed

⁶²⁷ Thompson, *English landed society*, p. 19. M., Montgomery, *'Gilded prostitution': status, money and transatlantic marriages 1870-1914* (London, 1989), p. 5.

⁶²⁸ PRO, PROB/11/1363, last will and testament of Arthur Hill, Marquess of Downshire, 1801 in Wilson, *Marriage and property* p. 73.

⁶²⁹ Wilson, *Marriage and property* p. 40.

⁶³⁰ Marriage settlement, NLI/MS/34,139/14.

his Co. Waterford lands to her.⁶³¹ When an estate was experiencing financial difficulties women were known to take a decrease in their jointure, or put some of their own private income into the estate, and Jane, Countess Bantry gave £10,000 to her son, the 4th Earl, to clear some of the estate's debt.⁶³² In March 1872, George Ryan of Inch, Co. Tipperary, a member of the Catholic gentry, added a codicil to his will dictating that his son and heir could not bestow a jointure to his future widow in excess of £300, and that any payments granted by his heirs could not be paid until all the annuities which he charged to the estate were serviced.⁶³³ George loved his own 'beloved wife' deeply and bequeathed to her all the contents of the house for her use during her lifetime, as well as his horses, and increased her £400 jointure by a quarter.⁶³⁴ However, as he had not yet met his future daughter-in-law, his emotions did not prevent him from acting in the best interest of the estate, and so he curtailed her allowance as much as possible. As Jessica Gerard has correctly stated; 'marriage was not just a mutual satisfaction of emotional and sexual needs, but a crucial social institution, upheld as a duty to both family and class.'⁶³⁵

Instead of being passive commodities in marriages arranged on economic principles, women were aware of the importance of mercenary considerations, even if they feigned innocence. Advice manuals dictated that women, other than widows embarking on a second marriage, should be represented in the drawing-up of the marriage settlement by their fathers or other male relatives.⁶³⁶ When Mary O'Brien became engaged in 1863, she wrote to her future sister-in-law, Lucy Gwynn, that she did not know when the marriage would actually take place, because she was waiting for her father and fiancé to discuss the

⁶³¹ Will of Hayes St Leger Viscount Doneraile, 1866, 1885, Doneraile Papers, NLI/MS/34,140/17.

⁶³² BL/EP/B/813 see also Geary, *Plan of Campaign*, p. 141; Will of Jane, Countess of Bantry, 1896, IE/BL/EP/110.

⁶³³ Will of George Ryan of Inch, IE/BL/EP/R/31.

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

⁶³⁵ Gerard, *Country house life*, p. 91.

⁶³⁶ Wilson, *marriage and property*, p. 43.

business.⁶³⁷ She may have been observing such a custom by claiming complete innocence of the financial arrangements, or perhaps she was eager to reassure Edward's family that she loved him for who he was, rather than the comfortable life he could afford her.

Later, other women teetered between a desire to appear innocent and an awareness of the importance of economic considerations. In 1882, Esther Grehan, who had earlier asked her fiancé to write to her about his feelings rather than 'business', wrote:

As you say I know I can trust you & should be quite willing to marry you tomorrow without a penny of settlement. All the same I think it is better to be business like & have things properly settled. I have not lived very long but I have heard of a good deal of misery resulting from business arrangements not being clearly defined.⁶³⁸

She was worldly enough to know the best way of pressuring solicitors to speed up their negotiations.⁶³⁹ Mabel O'Brien dedicated pages to saccharine words of her unworthiness, and innocence, but was fully aware of her and her husband's combined income, and when required, Mabel's persona in her letters switched to the highly efficient manager of finances and resources, which was her more natural role:

I have been considering your list and thinking about funds and have come to the conclusion that we are allowing ourselves too many pillow-slips. I think half the number would do us allowing for as many changes as we give ourselves in sheets and that would release £6.6.0 for bath-sheets and towels. I think if you insist on a whole £20 being set aside for a bicycle, which I consider a large allowance, that there would be nearly £65 left for linen and that if we sort it out carefully we could manage it for that nicely.⁶⁴⁰

Aside from Mary O'Brien, only one other woman in this sample, Lady Elizabeth Leigh, appears to have been shielded completely from the financial wrangling which surrounded her marriage, but this does not suggest that all women were excluded from such matters, as her mother was centrally involved.⁶⁴¹ Nearly thirty years after Elizabeth's wedding,

⁶³⁷ Mary O'Brien to Lucy Gwynn, 30 June 1862, NLI/MS/36,768.

⁶³⁸ Esther Chichester to Stephen Grehan, 1 Dec. 1883, IE/BL/EP/G/690 (emphasis original).

⁶³⁹ Ibid., 17 November 1882, IE/BL/EP/G/685.

⁶⁴⁰ Mabel O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, Feb. 1902, NLI/MS/36,699/2.

⁶⁴¹ Col. Egerton Leigh to Countess Bantry, 7 May 1874, IE/BL/EP/G/2341.

women could be heavily involved in the arrangements which surrounded their own nuptials. When Katherine Everett and her first cousin decided to get married in 1901, she laid down one condition: that they be financially free of any obligation to his mother, who had a tendency to speculate and fall into debt.⁶⁴² As Esther Grehan had been twenty years earlier, Katherine was fully aware of the importance of a secure financial agreement in preparation for a happy marriage.

Emotional considerations

With mercenary considerations playing so large a role in both the selection of a mate and the preparations for the wedding itself, it would be easy to presume that these were mere marriages of convenience. Some commentators have gone so far as to liken nineteenth-century middle- and upper-class marriage to prostitution.⁶⁴³ This was not the case. Women in this study were attracted to their husbands, and while social suitability was essential, women searched for personal compatibility also. Judith Schneid Lewis argued that the degree of emotional attachment required for a successful marriage altered during her period of enquiry from 1760-1860. In the eighteenth century, 'a quiet mutual regard based on hearsay and a short acquaintance was thought sufficient', but by 1860, it was necessary to be 'perfectly in love'.⁶⁴⁴ The change was largely one of perceptions rather than of emotional connections in marriage, and many of the marriages described by Schneid Lewis during the early part of that century were companionate and loving.⁶⁴⁵ This shift towards valuing emotional attachment was still perceived as new in the early-twentieth century in Munster. Women throughout this sample period believed that they were the first generation to marry for love.

⁶⁴² Everett, *Bricks*, p. 93.

⁶⁴³ For e.g., William T Stead, *The Americanization of the world* (first published 1902, reprint edn New York 1972) p. 123 quoted in Montgomery, *Gilded prostitution*.

⁶⁴⁴ Schneid Lewis, *Family way*, pp. 31, 30.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

In January 1863, Mary, the second daughter of Stephen and Ellen Spring-Rice was proposed to by Edward O'Brien, who, financially and socially, was a perfect match.

However, Mary dithered over her answer, because she did not know if she loved him enough, or if he knew her true personality. Making a decision caused her a good deal of distress, and she first turned him down before later consenting when he reiterated his proposal in June of the same year. She felt guilty for refusing Edward; yet, she was unwilling to enter into a marriage which was based on nothing higher than 'esteem'. She wrote to Edward's sister, Lucy:

It was from no want of confidence in him – in his excellent character – from no ignorance of what perhaps I care more for than you do, his talents & cultivation – it was from no doubt in himself that I was constrained to refuse him, only that, so far, he had never touched me. I know that you think it sufficient to have the grounds of affection – esteem & respect & gratitude in order to marry. I quite agree that many happy marriages are made with nothing else to start from... If I am the right woman to make Edward happy please God I shall find out in time. I cannot help doubting it however. I don't suppose I know him at all – tho' I now see him much better than I did; but as I do see, at times it seems to me as if there were some want of affinity between us that makes it quite quite impossible that we should really be meant for one another – that I sh[oul]d ever love him as he ought to be loved – or that his affection for me sh[oul]d not prove to be a delusion, founded on a mistaken estimate of my character.⁶⁴⁶

However, Mary was not new in her desire to find a husband whom she could love. The correspondence between her parents demonstrated great affection. Her father relied on her mother for advice and support, and wrote to his wife: 'however disappointing & insufficient may be the affection of friends and children, I may ever turn to you with perfect security, and to this knowledge I turn in all the trials of life with ever fresh delight.'⁶⁴⁷ Their ten children might perhaps be read as a sign of their sexual desire (or at least his) for each other. Mary's grandfather, the first Baron Monteagle, also appears to have enjoyed a loving relationship with his second wife Marianne. His granddaughter, Alice Spring-Rice, tenderly described the last day of his life. 'Aunt Ma never left him yesterday but lay by his side

⁶⁴⁶ Mary Spring-Rice to Lucy Gwynn, 21 Feb, 1863, NLI/MS/36,768.

⁶⁴⁷ Stephen Spring-Rice to Ellen Mary Spring-Rice, 29 May 1863, NLI/MS/36,753.

talking to him a little now & then...Once he tried to say “Marianne farewell”.⁶⁴⁸ So while Mary might have received one or two letters from members of the Co. Limerick gentry highlighting the practical attractions of Edward O’Brien, the examples of her immediate family demonstrated that marriages should be based on love and affection.

After their engagement, Mary sensed that Edward O’Brien was more old fashioned, and wrote to Lucy:

[H]e seems not at all to have expected & at first would scarcely believe that I could love him utterly & entirely, except from the insensible bonds of habit & the gradually growing multifarious affection w[hi]ch comes after marriage. In fact he did not believe that I sh[oul]d ever be “in love” with him.⁶⁴⁹

Still he was happy to marry her. Between February and June 1863, Mary’s feelings towards Edward changed. In June, her father reported:

My opinion of her regard for him is very much strengthened – She has two letters of him to me which I have in vain asked her to return she evidently chooses to keep ‘em and she makes no scruple of saying that she sees no one she likes so much⁶⁵⁰

When Mary accepted his second proposal she believed herself to be in love. The mixed demands of love and propriety were evident in her letter to her mother, which she wrote on the day of the engagement:

You will be happy please. I am promised to Edward. What have I to say? I am in the unhappy position of Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* obliged to assure you that I really have accepted him because I love him, after all the doubts & uncertainties w[hi]ch you have witnesses, Dear Mother I want very much to see you. But I am glad to think that my news will be a joy to you. You don’t know his worth, but you appreciate him enough to think him worthy of me & to be satisfied with our being engaged.⁶⁵¹

⁶⁴⁸ Alice Spring-Rice to Mary O’Brien, 1866, NLI/MS/36,764.

⁶⁴⁹ Mary O’Brien to Lucy Gwynn, 30 June 1863, NLI/36/768.

⁶⁵⁰ Stephen Spring-Rice to Ellen Mary Spring-Rice, 5 June 1863, NLI/MS/36,753. (emphasis original)

⁶⁵¹ Mary O’Brien to Ellen Spring Rice, 19 June 1863, NLI/MS/758/2.

The couple married in September of the same year, but Mary felt compelled to convince his family that she did really love him. Love was prized by everyone involved, and Lucy, Edward's sister, was wary of the strength of Mary's feelings. Mary explained the

sudden disappearance of my doubts & uncertainties. However it seems to me as if suddenness did not characterize any of my proceedings. I cared for him so much before I left Mt. Trenchard [her home where he had proposed for the first time] that Mother wanted to tell him to try his chances again. I could have persuaded people that I was very much in love with him (without saying a word that was not true) long before I believed it myself.⁶⁵²

Mabel O'Brien, who married Mary and Edward's eldest son thirty-nine years later, was no less convinced that she was living through a period of changing priorities when it came to securing marriage partners. She thought her mother had been quite liberal in allowing their correspondence to commence so early in their relationship, and before they had been engaged, and mused:

Of course times change but I suppose it is the individual actions of people like ourselves that make them change. I am very glad that our lot is cast in a generation where it matters more to be true and honest than to be orthodox and conventional. Not that I want to break away from either orthodoxy or conventions but to use them instead of bowing down to them.⁶⁵³

Women throughout this sample became engaged to men to whom they were attracted, and they enjoyed the attention of their fiancés. They liked to highlight the bonds of affection, and play down the mercenary nature of marriage, when discussing their own plans. Esther Grehan was annoyed when people told her how her marriage to Stephen Grehan was such 'a nice suitable match in every way'.⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵² Mary O'Brien to Lucy Gwynn, July 1863, NLI/36/768.

⁶⁵³ Mabel O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, 26 Jan. 1902, NLI/MS/36,699/2.

⁶⁵⁴ Esther Chichester to Stephen Grehan, 12 Nov. 1882, IE/BL/EP/G/680.

Sexual activity

While engagements were, in many cases, no more than six months in length,⁶⁵⁵ partners generally knew each other for some time before a proposal was offered, and accepted.

Lady Elizabeth Leigh tried to calm any of her father's reservations over her impending marriage by telling him that she had known her future husband for over a year, and so the relationship was 'tested'.⁶⁵⁶ The etiquette manual *Manners and Rules* advised that the couple 'make the engagement as brief as circumstances will permit'.⁶⁵⁷ Everyone concerned in the marriage of Lady Elizabeth and Egerton Leigh was 'glad that they both agree with the old saying "Happy is the wooing that's not long a doing"'.⁶⁵⁸ Lady Elizabeth had always been delicate in health and her mother believed 'her peculiar state of nerves and health generally render a long engagement both undesirable and hurtful'.⁶⁵⁹ M. Jeanne Peterson has argued that broken engagements were so shocking during the Victorian period because extensive sexual experimentation during this time was the norm.⁶⁶⁰ Peter Gay has also come to this conclusion through his analysis of the diary of the American bourgeois Mabel Loomis Todd, who went to her marriage only 'technically a virgin'.⁶⁶¹ None of the women in this sample kept comparably explicit diaries as Todd. However, there is evidence that some sexual activity was enjoyed before marriage between an engaged couple. Leonore Davidoff was incorrect in her statement that 'an unmarried woman under thirty could not go anywhere or be in a room even in her own house with an unrelated man unless accompanied'.⁶⁶² Even *Manners and Rules* condemned the 'strict ideas' held by some parents who would allow their daughters no private time with their beaux.⁶⁶³

⁶⁵⁵ Mary Spring-Rice and Edward O'Brien, Esther Chichester and Stephen Grehan, Lady Elizabeth White and Egerton Leigh, Mabel O'Brien and Dermot O'Brien were all married in less than six months after the proposal, but Ethel, Lady Inchiquin waited six months.

⁶⁵⁶ Elizabeth White to 3rd Earl Bantry, 8 May 1874, IE/BL/EP/B/2438.

⁶⁵⁷ *Manners and rules*, p. 251.

⁶⁵⁸ Col. Egerton Leigh to 3rd Earl Bantry, IE/BL/EP/B/2341/1

⁶⁵⁹ Jane Countess Bantry to 3rd Earl Bantry, May 12 1874, IE/BL/EP/B/2395.

⁶⁶⁰ Peterson, *Family, love and work*, pp. 75-77.

⁶⁶¹ Peter Gay, *The bourgeois experience: Victoria to Freud* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 80-81.

⁶⁶² L. Davidoff. *Best circles*, p. 50.

⁶⁶³ *Manners and rules*, p. 250.

Most families seem to have permitted their daughters time alone with their fiancés. This suggests that parents wanted happiness for their daughter, and were allowing her time to ease herself into married life, and sexual activity. Writing to her mother, Mary O'Brien described her typical day just before, and after her engagement to Edward, when the pair were given space to get to know each other better. They and a chaperone would walk in the woods, 'Then Aubrey [her brother] or whoever else is with us is discreetly seized with a botanizing or tree climbing or exploring mania & Edward & I are left to bore one another as much as we can.'⁶⁶⁴ Edward stayed with her family for three weeks, and they were not 'separated for more than an hour or so' during the day.⁶⁶⁵

During their engagement in 1874, Elizabeth and Egerton Leigh went into London together for a day, to allow her to have her photograph taken for him to keep.⁶⁶⁶ A few months earlier, Lord Castletown missed his fiancée because it was cold, and she was not there to 'conoodle him'. He signed off one of his letters after remembering the wonderful surprise of the first time she told him that she loved him, with the words; 'I love you xo xo very much Clare...10000 kisses[,] your ever loving old Bear.'⁶⁶⁷ In 1882, Esther Grehan contrived to secure time alone with her husband when the other members of the household were busy. She wrote in one of her letters that she did not mind giving her future husband 'kisses on paper' as they did not make her 'hot'.⁶⁶⁸

By the time Mabel O'Brien was engaged in the winter of 1901-2, she wrote more extensively about the physical aspect of their relationship. She loved to see him get into 'heat', and 'cuddle up close' and look into his eyes⁶⁶⁹ and would hold him in her arms, while he would put his head in the 'little corner' of her shoulder. Mabel wrote that she hungered

⁶⁶⁴ Mary O'Brien to Ellen Spring-Rice, 27 June 1863, NLI/MS/36,758/2.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁶ Countess of Bantry to 3rd Earl Bantry, 14 May 1874, BL/EP/B/2395.

⁶⁶⁷ Lord Castletown to Lady Castletown, 11 Feb. 1874, and n.d. [Feb] 1874, R3, Bisbrooke.

⁶⁶⁸ Esther Chichester to Stephen Grehan, 30 Oct. 1882, BL/EP/G/673.

⁶⁶⁹ Mabel O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien 2 Feb. 1902, NLI/MS/36,699/3.

for him 'in an absurd sort of way which won't be reasoned with,'⁶⁷⁰ and signed off one of her letters with: 'Good night dear little D. I give you one little tiny kiss on your lips and then one big long one and then wait for you to crush me up in your arms and take the biggest longest one of all – Good night.'⁶⁷¹ Mabel was surprised at the extent of her own sexual desire:

I just like to let myself go and feel you sweep me up, rags and bones and all. Dearest old D. what have you done with all my reserve and restraint and self control. I thought I lived behind walls and you have brushed them all away as if they were cobwebs and taken possession and I am well pleased that it should be so.⁶⁷²

Later she wondered 'why it doesn't seem strange at all and why I find so much pleasure in rubbing up against you and fitting your head into my corners.'⁶⁷³

But for all her enjoyment in 'wasting one's time... rubbing...two heads together' and her claim that they would be 'an absolutely demoralized pair by the time' they reached 'the Holyhead pier' on the first day of their honeymoon, Mabel was nervous of sex.⁶⁷⁴ For her, the 'somewhat alarming and mysterious state of matrimony' held a 'mystery and a happiness and a little thread of fear of the unknown runs through it all.'⁶⁷⁵ She asked her fiancé to be patient with her, as the occasional sense of panic could 'not be explained or avoided'.⁶⁷⁶ Mabel was not unique in her sense of trepidation. In 1882, the twenty-three-year-old Esther Grehan wrote to her fiancé that even though he was 'worth it all', she could not help feeling 'a little frightened because it seems dark leaving the old life that I know.'⁶⁷⁷ Her fear might have been increased by the premature death of her elder sister the previous year, ten months after her wedding day, and just weeks after giving birth to her first

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., 9 Feb. 1902.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., 1 Jan. 1902, NLI/MS/36,699/2.

⁶⁷² Ibid., 5 Feb. 1902, NLI/MS/36,699/3.

⁶⁷³ Ibid., 8 Feb. 1902.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., 2 Feb. 1902.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid., 17 and 24 Jan. 1902, NLI/MS/36,699/2.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid., 24 Dec., 1901, NLI/MS/36,699/1.

⁶⁷⁷ Esther Chichester to Stephen Grehan, 18 Oct., 1882, BL/EP/G/664.

child.⁶⁷⁸ While these women had the pleasure of marrying men to whom they were attracted, and were given time alone together to explore these feelings, they were not given much practical advice about the physical realities of married life. In her biography, Margaret Cousins, the Irish suffragist, demonstrated just how ignorant a woman might be on consummating her marriage. She remembered:

My new knowledge, though I was lovingly safe-guarded from it, made me ashamed of humanity and ashamed for it. I found myself looking on me and women as degraded by this demand of nature. Something in me revolted then, and has ever since protested against, certain of the techniques of nature connected with sex. Nor will I and many men and women of like nature, including my husband, be satisfied, be purified and redeemed, life after life, until the evolution of form has substituted some more artistic way of continuance of the race.⁶⁷⁹

Love and lust outside marriage

None of the couples wrote about sex in the way that it is commonly discussed today, but that is not to say that they did not enjoy fulfilling emotional and sexual lives. In letters, the loving way spouses addressed each other, long into married life,⁶⁸⁰ suggested that their relationships were close and affectionate, and husbands and wives alluded to sex by claiming that they missed their partners most during the evening and night time. Julia O'Brien wrote to her husband, Edward: 'I have lain awake crying for the pain of this absence.'⁶⁸¹ Mary O'Brien suggested that her honeymoon period was enjoyable when she wrote to her sister-in-law, Lucy:

[W]e have had a visit from a newly married couple on their way for a winter abroad...I felt very spiteful & envious, & c[oul]d have wished myself back into last year, even tho[ugh] Baby w[oul]d have vanished into futurity.⁶⁸²

⁶⁷⁸ Chapter four p. 219

⁶⁷⁹ Cousins and Cousins, *We two together* (Madras, 1950), p. 108.

⁶⁸⁰ Ethel, Lady Inchiquin to 15th Baron Inchiquin, correspondence of Mabel and Dermod O'Brien, Lord and Lady Castletown for example.

⁶⁸¹ n.d. 1900, NLI/MS/36,772.

⁶⁸² Mary O'Brien to Lucy Gwynn, 3 Feb. 1865, NLI/MS/37,768.

It was widely assumed in Victorian literature, by the medical profession, and by the holders of government, that, unlike women, men ‘needed’ sexual activity to stay healthy. Such thinking was evident in the debate against the Contagious Diseases Acts. Even some of those working against the Acts, such as Thomas Haslam, subscribed to the notion that upper and middle class women had no interest in sex, while men were naturally unchaste.⁶⁸³ A minority of men, in this sample, held the belief that they had the right to be sexually active outside of marriage, provided that they did not damage the reputation of any woman of their own class. Four years before his marriage, Lord Castletown was prescribed treatment for herpes.⁶⁸⁴ During his engagement, he wrote to his fiancée; ‘oh dear me what a change from my old days of liberty -! What do you mean by catching me & tying me so tight Miss Clare.’⁶⁸⁵ He claimed that his feelings were like nothing he had experienced before, yet he did not deny that he had had previous relationships, as he did not want there to be secrets between them.⁶⁸⁶ He did not follow his own advice on openness, however, and during his marriage, sent a secret allowance to a mistress, ‘Mrs Palgrave’, in Paris for the upkeep of their illegitimate child.⁶⁸⁷ He was not always prompt with this, and she was forced to write on at least one occasion: ‘May I have another cheque at the earliest moment possible?’⁶⁸⁸ None of their surviving correspondence is dated, so it is unclear when the affair began, but Castletown was still paying the annuity in 1897 – twenty three years after his marriage.⁶⁸⁹ He went to extensive lengths to ensure that his wife would remain ignorant of the affair, and had all letters from his mistress directed to his club and addressed to ‘Godfrey Levinge c/o Lord Castletown’. How this third party felt about being an accessory to such a deception is unclear, but Lord Castletown trusted him to keep up

⁶⁸³ C. Quinlan, *Genteel revolutionaries*, pp. 76-7, 79-80.

⁶⁸⁴ MS/34,187/2.

⁶⁸⁵ Lord Castletown to Lady Castletown, 19 Jan 1874, R3 Bisbrooke.

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 11 Feb, 19 Jan. 1874.

⁶⁸⁷ Correspondence, NLI/MS/34,187/6.

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, Mrs Palgrave to Lord Castletown, n.d.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, Lord Castletown to Godfrey Levinge n.d.

the payments in the event of Castletown's serious illness.⁶⁹⁰ This deception is all the more poignant as he and his wife had no children to survive them, at least one dying in infancy.⁶⁹¹

Another of Lady Castletown's relations (possibly her grandfather) had a similar experience. His German mistress, who may have been a singer, Fraulein Nachtigale, was treated more harshly than Mrs Palgrave, and was forced, in 1867, to sign a declaration that no child was born to the pair.⁶⁹² Numerous friends and relatives wanted to help 'Poor young Conyngham' out of his difficulty with this woman, who was from a much more modest background. She was perceived as a problem, and little sympathy was shown her when she wrote begging letters asking for money to save her from destitution. It was hoped that she would leave the country and not make herself known to his female relations.⁶⁹³

These men were not alone in their promiscuity. Edward O'Brien had two older half siblings which his father, William Smith O'Brien, had fathered with a woman he met while living in London before his marriage.⁶⁹⁴ In the Ryan family papers, George made provision for a woman and her child to live in perpetuity in a cottage on the estate; the child was his half sister.⁶⁹⁵ In 1866, Viscount Doneraile left an extremely generous legacy of 'two thousand pounds...to little Margaret Chambers now living with the Burys', and asked that his friend Mr Longfield look after the girl's money for her.⁶⁹⁶ Such generosity would suggest that Chambers was his unacknowledged illegitimate child. He also left an ex-servant £500 by way of apology for her losing her place at Doneraile, 'through accusations that were perfectly false.'⁶⁹⁷ Perhaps this was an apology for a sexual indiscretion. Both of these

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁹¹ A lock of the baby's hair is among the family papers at Bisbrooke Hall, R3.

⁶⁹² 11 Feb 1867. NLI/MS/34,146/8.

⁶⁹³ Corr. 1865-74, Ibid., and NLI/MS/34,007/9.

⁶⁹⁴ R. Davis, *Revolutionary Imperialist: William Smith O'Brien* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 40-41.

⁶⁹⁵ IE/BL/EP/R/31.

⁶⁹⁶ Draft will of Viscount Doneraile, 6 June 1853, NLI/MS/34,140/15.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid.

legacies were allowed to lapse in later versions of his will, when he had legitimate children. His final will was most generous to his wife, and their only surviving child, Lady Castletown.⁶⁹⁸

In their promiscuity, these men were led by the Prince of Wales, who was well known for his dalliances with married women.⁶⁹⁹ Among the very highest society, extra-marital affairs were widely known, and had long been practised.⁷⁰⁰ Some studies of aristocratic marriages have found that once the parentage of the heir was secured, a woman could engage in an extramarital affair without social sanction, provided such activity was carried out discreetly. Indeed it has been suggested that couples with little in common bar their social and economic suitability implicitly consented to each other's affairs.⁷⁰¹ This was certainly the case with Randolph and Jenny Churchill née Jerome, who engaged in multitudinous affairs and lived virtually separate lives.⁷⁰²

The majority of the couples in the Munster sample appear to have been less extravagant in their love lives, and remained faithful to their partner. Only one couple rivalled the scandalous activities known to occur among the Churchills and others of the Prince of Wales' Marlborough House Set. Lord and Lady Castletown's correspondence varied in tone throughout their married life. They had pet names for each other, and it would appear that they loved each other deeply. Yet Lady Castletown consistently engaged in flirtatious correspondence with other men, with the seeming knowledge of her husband. She had no intention of openly breaking with convention, or of ever leaving her husband. This flirtation may have led to an affair through letters with the eminent American judge Oliver Wendell Holmes, who kept up a passionate correspondence with her for decades.

⁶⁹⁸ 1866 and 1885, NLI/MS/34,140/15.

⁶⁹⁹ Kehoe, *Fortunes daughters*, pp. 63-78.

⁷⁰⁰ A. Foreman, *The duchess: Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire* (London, 1998, 2008), pp. 65-66, 80, 267 for examples.

⁷⁰¹ Schneid-Lewis, *Family way*, p. 39-40.

⁷⁰² Kehoe, *Fortunes daughters*, p. 104, 137.

Lady Castletown even entertained him at her home in Doneraile alone, and her husband apparently ignored the affair. For a married woman to welcome a man to her home was deemed as an indiscretion.⁷⁰³ G. Edward White devoted a chapter of his 1993 biography of Wendell Holmes to the judge's affair with Lady Castletown, signifying its importance in his life. White described the relationship as 'Holmes' greatest romance'.⁷⁰⁴ While the biography was meticulously researched, and is to be commended for exploring Holmes' relationship with women, it is clear that the author lacked familiarity with the Irish, and British, landed class and made numerous spelling errors and slips regarding names, places and events.⁷⁰⁵

Lady Castletown had at least one other affair: with Percy La Touche who was heir to his family estate in Co. Kildare, and who had a reputation as a womaniser.⁷⁰⁶ This liaison was known about and facilitated by the Castletowns' close friends, the Earl and Countess Bandon. Percy's love letters to Lady Castletown survive among Countess Bandon's papers. Lady Castletown probably left them to her informally, perhaps as a way of keeping them secret, or at least hidden, from her husband.⁷⁰⁷ Lady Castletown's responses to the letters do not survive, but they make it clear that a good deal of physical intimacy occurred between the couple. An undated letter written from the Kildare Street Club, demonstrated something of the nature of their relationship:

I do miss you so, my Beloved! Not only in the night when I long to hear the soft murmur of your gentle voice, to see the love-light in your glorious eyes, the gleam of your white teeth, & all the exquisite beauty of your form; to feel the perfume of your lovely arms, the beating of heart within the fairest of all fair breaths, the maddening sweetness of your priceless kisses, & all the indescribable rapture of 'being loved by you'⁷⁰⁸

⁷⁰³ Ibid., p. 85-86.

⁷⁰⁴ White, *Holmes*, p. 249.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., pp249, 350, 539.

⁷⁰⁶ Bence-Jones, *Twilight*, p. 54.

⁷⁰⁷ P. La Touche to Lady Castletown, R4, Bisbrooke Hall.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., n.d.

La Touche assured her that he treasured the memories of the 'brewing raptures of those delicious nights'.⁷⁰⁹ Lady Castletown was unwilling to let the affair go too far, and would not contemplate leaving her husband. In 1896, she asked Percy to change the nature of their relationship, and tried to belittle the attraction between them. Percy was deeply hurt:

Only remember, that you never were a Friend of mine & never never can be one – What I have been to you and what I am, I know not, but this I know, that I would a thousand times rather be dead & forgotten by you altogether than that I should think that you regarded me as a "Friend" of yours⁷¹⁰

Castletown led the pace of the affair, and while La Touche wrote that 'every hour of the day & the night I am yours and yours only'⁷¹¹ (despite having a wife of his own), he could not trust her to remain faithful to him. He was jealous of Lady Castletown's relationship with Wendell Holmes, but seemed to bear no envy towards her husband:

I wish I dared trust you more, my Beloved...I have often likened you to a snake, you beautiful ophidian, but I will there was a little more of the 'dead adder' about you so that you would not unfold your lovely coils at the voice of a challenger (with an American accent)....my heart aches with distrust⁷¹²

Clare managed to control both of her lovers. She told Percy that his exclamations of love 'bored' her, and they both complained about her lack of consistency as a correspondent.⁷¹³

These affairs, while outside the remit of strictest propriety, were conducted to allow Lady Castletown a bit of excitement and possibly sexual pleasure, rather than as a reckless challenge to her position in society. In looking at the wider correspondence which surrounds the pair, it is possible to see that such activity was given the implicit sanction of their peers. La Touche remained friends with Lord Castletown, and even pleaded the latter's case with Lady Castletown when they went through a period of marital discord; presumably around the time of Lord Castletown's mental ill-health.⁷¹⁴ La Touche did not

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid., 7 Oct. 1896.

⁷¹⁰ Ibid. 6 Sept. 1896 (emphasis original).

⁷¹¹ Ibid., 7 Oct. 1896.

⁷¹² Ibid., 18 Sept. 1896.

⁷¹³ Ibid., 12 Nov [1899].

⁷¹⁴ Ibid., 31 Oct. [n.d.], see also telegrams 1899, R5, Bisbrooke Hall papers. See also White, *Holmes*, notes 104, 110, p. 541.

want her to leave her husband and cause a scandal, no more than she did. This would have jeopardised their affair, and their positions in society. The Castletowns and La Touches appear to have occupied a world where reasonably conducted extra-marital affairs were delicately tolerated. La Touche even addressed Lady Castletown as 'Lady Barnie' (the nickname of her husband) and reported news, in the later years of their correspondence, of his own wife's health.⁷¹⁵ Lord Castletown, in turn, was in contact with la Touche's wife, and asked her to visit him in Doneraile, after their spouses were involved in a riding accident.⁷¹⁶ Lord Castletown appears to have been forgiving of his wife's indiscretions. He encouraged her to go to parties 'and have a good time of it' while he was away.⁷¹⁷ He wrote to Oliver Wendell Holmes in a friendly manner, giving him reports of Clare's illness, and even telling Wendell Holmes when her eyesight would allow her to read his letters again.⁷¹⁸

Perhaps, as an heiress, Lady Castletown had greater freedom over how she chose to conduct her relationships. She had her own property in Doneraile, where she could receive visitors while her husband spent time at his estate in Co. Laois. Both of her affairs were conducted with married men, neither of whom lived within easy distance of her home. Wendell Holmes, who lived in Boston, was a particularly suitable partner, as his letters could be both mentally stimulating and personally flattering, but his physical absence meant that there was little danger of the affair threatening either of their marriages. For all her misdemeanours, she stayed true to her husband, and bequeathed all her belongings to him in her will of 1907.⁷¹⁹

It was more difficult for women to conceal affairs, because of the potential of pregnancy. Castletown had already been married for over twenty years in 1896, when the two men were vying for her attentions. At this stage, she could be reasonably confident

⁷¹⁵ Ibid., 30 Mar., 2 Apr., n.d.[1914 or later].

⁷¹⁶ Annette la Touche to Lord Castletown, 11 May 1899, R5.

⁷¹⁷ [Sept 1896] Lord Castletown to Lady Castletown, R3.

⁷¹⁸ Telegrams 1899, R5, Bisbrooke Hall papers. See also White, *Holmes*, notes 104, 110, p. 541.

⁷¹⁹ Will, 1907, 35,303/1.

that no unwanted pregnancy could occur to bring the extramarital relationship out in the open. Lord Castletown, had no such difficulty; he could hide his illegitimate child and pay the mother for her silence. In all of their romantic endeavours, whether clandestine or overt, these women were at a distinct disadvantage to the men of their class. While most managed to find economically and emotionally suitable matches, they were painfully aware of the importance of protecting their chaste reputations.

Mary O'Brien could not write directly to her admirer, Edward, to discuss her feelings, and had instead to go through his sister, who she did not know very long.⁷²⁰ When her feelings towards him changed, she could not tell him, but had to wait patiently for him to ask her again. Edward was invited to Bournemouth to stay with Mary and her relations, but her father was concerned about the situation, and its affect on Mary's reputation:

In ordinary cases, When a girl is with her own family, and a gentleman (being a neighbour with by the accident of the moment or other circumstances,) is frequently in her society & pays her more or less of attention, the position of affairs, so far as it becomes known to the world, explains itself, and whatever may be the final result, nobody can justly say that it lay with the lady or her friends to hurry in a conclusion – But the case that has now unfortunately arisen is totally different – Mr O'B goes to a plan where he has, consistently, no intention but one; he gets introduced to the relations ; and with whom this lady is staying & then presents his visits. Those [?] circumstances afford conclusive evidence of his intentions; & if the lady should ultimately refuse, the world would not unnaturally say that she had encouraged him for mere flirtation sake, For she knew what he was aiming at: & she would not get credit for having been uncertain in her feelings. I think then that before long I must write to Edward & require that this visit shd be concluded one way or another.⁷²¹

Propriety and public perception were still an issue in 1902. Mabel O'Brien was immediately attracted to Dermot, but was unsure of his feelings, so she was 'quite ready to take [his] friendship as a very good thing if it was never to be more.'⁷²² She could not instigate a relationship. One morning, after their engagement, Mabel decided she would go to visit Dermot, who was sick in bed, but, as she reported, 'Mother put down her foot... and my

⁷²⁰ Mary O'Brien to Lucy Gwynn, Feb-May 1863, NLI/MS/36,768.

⁷²¹ Stephen Spring-Rice to Ellen Spring-Rice, 10 June 1863, NLI/MS/36,753 (emphasis original).

⁷²² Mabel O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, 16 Jan. 1902, NLI/MS/36,699/2.

resolution buckled like a torpedo-destroyer.’ She wished she knew ‘of some drops good against propriety spasms.’ Mabel acknowledged her own inconsistency, as she would ‘not have thought it correct’ for Dermot to visit her while she was sick in bed, but had not ‘the smallest compunction’ about visiting him, before her mother had pointed out the indiscretion.⁷²³ Before their engagement, and despite his ‘pretended ignorance’, she reprimanded him: ‘We are strong on propriety in Our Village and I neither could nor did invite you to come and buy tools for the Carving Class in company’.⁷²⁴ With such limits on women’s ability to interact publicly with men, family networks and private events were essential arenas for them to find, and get to know, a suitable life partner.

Family involvement

The maternal grandmother of Katherine Everett née Herbert was born a Herbert of Muckross House. Katherine’s mother returned to Killarney as the wife of Henry Herbert of Cahirnane, a lesser branch of the Herbert family. When Katherine grew up, she returned to England and married her maternal first cousin, who had the confusing name of Herbert Everett.⁷²⁵ Mary O’Brien’s grandfather’s second wife, Marianne, was the sister of two of his sons-in-law. Mary’s widower, Edward’s, second wife, was Marianne’s niece.⁷²⁶ Such intimate consanguinity may have been unusual, but it was customary for there to be established connections between the families of bride and groom, and the upper-echelons of society have been likened to a tribe.⁷²⁷ Some historians would have one believe that the women of this class, during the long nineteenth century, became unmarriageable, or at least undesirable in the marriage market, if they had not been snapped up in the first year

⁷²³ Ibid., 25 Jan. 1902.

⁷²⁴ Ibid, 5 Nov. 1901, NLI/MS/36,699/1.

⁷²⁵ Everett, *Bricks*, p. 10.

⁷²⁶ Thompson, *English landed society*, almost unveiled this link, p. 129.

⁷²⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

or two after coming out, this was not the case during the period in question.⁷²⁸ Jessica Gerard has carried out valuable statistical analysis on one hundred landed families who lived in England and Wales during the period 1815 to 1914. She has observed that women of this class often waited seven or eight years after coming out before they wed. The mean age at marriage for all landlords' daughters in her sample was twenty-seven, 'falling to twenty-five later in the period'.⁷²⁹ In my sample, the mean age for marriage of daughters was twenty-five, and for the wives of landlords it was twenty-three.⁷³⁰ The average age of marriage for heirs to estates in this sample was thirty-two, which equals Gerard's mean age for heirs born between 1850 and 1874.⁷³¹ Men and women, therefore, had plenty of time to develop relationships with numerous members of their class. Marriages were not arranged, but families did their best to engineer situations where likely couples might meet, and did everything possible to avoid undesirable suitors meeting their daughters.

Pat Jalland, and others, have discussed the 'mecca for matchmaking' that was the London Season. London did play a role in securing husbands for some of the daughters of the Munster landed class. Lady Elizabeth Leigh was in London when her future husband proposed in May 1874. Baron Carbery wooed his bride at a May Ball in Cambridge, where there was another season, and married her six months later, in November 1890.⁷³² The importance of the London season can be over-emphasised, however. Cannadine has observed that by the 1880s London society was changing. He has argued that it lost some of its value for the traditional landed class, as many wealthy commercial families had muscled their way into society, and, as a result, daughters of landlords were making up a diminishing percentage of the burgeoning numbers presented annually at court.⁷³³ This increase in presentations was already beginning in 1868, when Elizabeth, Olive and Ina, the

⁷²⁸ Davidoff, L, *The best circles: society etiquette and the season* (London, 1986), p. 52. Grubgeld

⁷²⁹ Gerard, *Country house life*, p. 24.

⁷³⁰ Tables 1 and 2.

⁷³¹ Table 1.1 in Jessica Gerard, *Country house life*, p. 25, see Table 3.

⁷³² Sandford (ed.), *West Cork Journal*, 11; Davidoff, *Best Circles*, p. 72.

⁷³³ Cannadine, *Decline and fall*, p. 342.

Earl of Bantry's elder daughters, were presented at court at 'the fullest drawing room known for ages'. Despite being happy with their appearances, and seeing the 'the Charles Bernards, Carberys, Sidmouths, Towers, Dunravens...besides everyone you ever heard of.' The experience seems to have been underwhelming, and not likely to procure an offer of marriage, or even to allow someone to attract the attention of a likely suitor:

[It was] the fullest drawing room known for ages, we were about an hour & a half getting through the three long rooms before the Throne- Room & the heat & crush were dreadful – The Queen had left some time before we arrived at the Throne Room as there were two huge room-fulls of people on before the room we were in, so we were presented to Princess Helena which we were sorry for... – getting away was dreadful I should think we were over two hours in a dense crowd in the hall, the carriages swarmed to that degree there was nothing to do but wait for ones turn, numbers could not get hold of their carriages at all, & walked home, how they ever got out to do so I can't think as one was jammed literally.⁷³⁴

London, while undoubtedly a meeting place for families like the Bantrys, who could afford town houses,⁷³⁵ was no longer, if it ever was, the centre of match-making for this class. It is notable that the Dublin season does not appear to have played a large role in facilitating marriages for these women. Lady Castletown attended events in Dublin, but this was after her marriage. There has been little or no detailed research on the Dublin season, and the one work which does examine the social life of Dublin Castle has too long a time-span to deal meaningfully with any period.⁷³⁶ Perhaps families who could afford a town house preferred to direct their energies towards London. Certainly Mary O'Brien's family and social life was centred on England rather than Ireland, and some friends were disappointed that she was marrying an 'Irishman', and so might not be in England regularly.⁷³⁷

Private gatherings had a distinct advantage over public events for those hoping to find a partner because of the custom of introductions. Working on the premise that it was better for a girl to 'spend a comparatively dull evening than that she should run the risk of

⁷³⁴ Elizabeth White to 3rd Earl Bantry, 13 May 1868, IE/BL/EP/B/2436 (emphasis original).

⁷³⁵ Letters to Countess of Bantry, Oct-Nov 1880, NLI/MS/2,412/17.

⁷³⁶ J. Robins, *Champagne and silver buckles: the Viceregal Court at Dublin Castle, 1700-1922* (Dublin, 2001).

⁷³⁷ Anon. to Mary O'Brien, 26 June [1863], NLI/MS/36,769.

forming undesirable acquaintances,⁷³⁸ the prescribed etiquette dictated that no introduction should be made without the prior consent of both parties. Then it should only be made by someone who could vouch for the character of each.⁷³⁹ While reality might have been more fluid, it is unlikely that young women met many single men socially who were completely unknown to their friends or family. Olive Ardilaun had one particularly successful ball before her marriage, since she was well known to the Smith-Barrys, who were the hosts of the event, and could introduce her to all of their guests. Her sister reported, 'She enjoyed herself beyond words & danced everything'.⁷⁴⁰ In contrast to public events, where admission could be bought, and chaperonage was deemed 'indispensable for young ladies',⁷⁴¹ at country houses and dinner parties it was deemed suitable for the hostess to act as chaperone to her unmarried guests.

Unfortunately for the historian, a record of the first encounter between future spouses rarely survives. However, existing evidence suggests that country-house parties were important occasions for matchmaking. Lady Carbery recognised the value of a good hostess in the process. Her grandmother, in England, 'was a capital host' who invited 'any number of cousins...who immediately fell in love with one another and with young friends from round about'.⁷⁴² While staying with a Mrs Prescott, Mary O'Brien was able to socialise with a number of eligible bachelors, and numerous garden parties and 'dancing teas' were arranged. She described one such occasion:

Generally after dinner all the younger part of the community rush out to the billiard room, (as it is called, there is no billiard table,) which is outdoors near the stables, & while one grinds [the music] the others dance. Its [sic] great fun.⁷⁴³

⁷³⁸ *Manners and rules* p. 12.

⁷³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁰ Elizabeth White to Earl Bantry, 13 May 1868, IE/BL/EP/B/2436. (emphasis original)

⁷⁴¹ *Manners and rules* p. 228.

⁷⁴² Carbery, *Happy world*, p. 13.

⁷⁴³ Mary O'Brien to Lady Molyneux, 3, 21 June 1859, NLI/MS/36,767.

Stephen Grehan, of Clonmeen, recorded the beginning of his relationship with his future wife briefly in his diary: 'At Frenchpark [sic], Miss E. Chichester came.'⁷⁴⁴ This meeting took place while he was at a shooting party at her neighbour's house in Co. Roscommon. Their relationship blossomed four years later, while she was staying with the Murroghs in Doneraile, a more convenient distance of about twenty miles from his home. During this stay in Doneraile, the couple managed to spend time alone together on his numerous overnight or two-day visits.⁷⁴⁵ Country house stays also led to the development of the relationship between Dermot O'Brien and his future wife, Mabel, in 1901. Dermot had written one polite letter to her in 1896, but after she stayed for a week at his family seat in the summer of 1901, their relationship rapidly progressed towards marriage. At Cahirmoyle, they had the freedom to go for long walks together, and to have private conversations.⁷⁴⁶ This pattern of freedom, within a controlled setting, suited all members of the class.

Families had a genuine interest in their daughters' welfare, which was born out of a domestic closeness which existed in these families. Mary O'Brien's parents were worried about her happiness when she was proposed to by Edward O'Brien. When her father Stephen Spring-Rice knew Edward was to propose for a second time, he wrote to his wife:

I feel almost angry uncertain and anxious. I think it very probable she may consent; but I don't think and she can give a hearty & unhesitating consent. If on the other hand she should refuse, I don't think she will by any means heartily rejoice that the affair sh[oul]d be over – Thus either way I see little chance of her gaining repose of mind.⁷⁴⁷

In spite of these concerns, Mary's parents did everything in their power to facilitate the match. While her father stated that 'everything depends' on her feeling, they were just as

⁷⁴⁴ Stephen Grehan Diary entry, 4 Aug. 1880, IE/BL/EP/G/735.

⁷⁴⁵ Esther Chichester to Stephen Grehan, 9 Nov. 1882, IE/BL/EP/G/680 for example.

⁷⁴⁶ Mabel O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, 16 Jan 1901, NLI/MS/36,699/2.

⁷⁴⁷ Stephen Spring-Rice to Ellen Spring-Rice, 5 June 1863, NLI/MS/36,753.

aware as Mary was that Edward was a suitable partner.⁷⁴⁸ Even though his manners were not always the most engaging, Mary's mother encouraged his visits to Mount Trenchard, the family home, as she thought he 'Might take a liking' to one of her eight daughters, though she was not sure how his advances would be received. She was reported to say: "I don't think he w[oul]d have a chance with any – except Mary – Mary might have him!"⁷⁴⁹ Mary was well aware of her family's well-meaning expectations, and knew that her 'Father – still more strongly [her] mother - & Aunt Ellen' would like her to acquiesce to Edward's proposal.⁷⁵⁰ Mary may have been projecting this pressure, and her own mercenary feelings onto her parents, as they did not want her to marry Edward, if she did not love him.

Such latent, or perceived, pressure from family, coupled with the knowledge that they were not free to pursue a man to whom they were attracted, but had to wait coyly for a proposal, meant that it was not unusual for women's feelings to be swayed by external pressures. While Stephen Spring-Rice hoped Mary could ignore 'well meant but injudicious advice from others,'⁷⁵¹ the turning point for Mary was Edward's 'success in gaining the affection of my people here', which was a 'triumphant delight to her'.⁷⁵² Esther Chichester commented on the inevitability of a woman accepting persistent advances:

Sir C. Wolsely coming to town last season to look for an heiress ... was introduced to two Miss Murphys whose father is making a great deal of money in America. They are vulgar but pretty & were a good deal taken up in Rome last winter[.] Sir Charles saw & was conquered[,] really fell violently in love[,] but unfortunately for him, he bore the reputation of a fortune hunter & the young lady will have none of him... Jerome Vaughan ... has induced Miss Murphy to go down with her Mother to Wolsely, it is weak of her to go if she does not mean to yield, but she probably will – I shall be interested to hear the 'denouement'⁷⁵³

She herself was not immune to persuasion and she claimed that it was Stephen Grehan who first fell in love with her and persuaded her to love him too. 'You see dearest old

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid., 20 May 1863.

⁷⁴⁹ Mary O'Brien to Lucy Gwynn, 7 Jan., 1864, NLI/MS/36,768.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid., 21 Feb 1863..

⁷⁵¹ Stephen Spring-Rice to Ellen Spring-Rice, 20 May 1863, NLI/MS/36,753.

⁷⁵² Mary O'Brien to Lucy Gwynn, 30 June 1863, NLI/MS/36,768.

⁷⁵³ Esther Chichester to Stephen Grehan, 3 Dec. 1882, IE/BL/EP/G/692.

fellow you were right to be patient with me – one can't be near the flame without catching fire too!⁷⁵⁴ Gertrude Foster was delighted when her sister 'learned to love' Lucius O'Brien, the heir to the Inchiquin baronetcy, and the only man whom she could be happy to see her sister marry.⁷⁵⁵ Love, economics, and family opinion all affected these women's choice of partner, and the importance of these three aspects was demonstrated through the spectacle that upper-class weddings became during the nineteenth century.

Wedding as an event

Judith Schneid Lewis has demonstrated how aristocratic weddings in Britain developed from discreet affairs, with only one or two members of the immediate family present, to 'the social extravaganzas so dear to twentieth-century hearts.'⁷⁵⁶ By the 1860s, the weddings of the Munster landed class had become important social events. Despite Esther Grehan's half-hearted wish to run away and get married quietly, she decided it was best that they stick to convention and in fact she delighted in her wedding preparations and dress.⁷⁵⁷ Weddings could become symbols of both the economic strength of the couple and their families, and their strong romantic attachment. The importance of weddings as propagandist spectacles was emphatically expressed by the pageantry surrounding the wedding of Ethel Foster to Lucius O'Brien, heir to the Inchiquin baronetcy.

The ritual and trappings which surrounded the wedding emphasised that this marriage was a love match, rather than a marriage of convenience. By now, white was firmly established as the colour of choice for fashionable brides, and Ethel did not disappoint the newspapers by choosing a dress of white satin, point de Venise lace, with a belt of pearls. She also wore orange blossom in her hair and held a bouquet of the same

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid., 18 Oct. 1882, BL/EP/G/664.

⁷⁵⁵ Gertrude Foster to Ethel, Lady Inchiquin, 21 Jan 1896, NLI/MS/45,503/1.

⁷⁵⁶ Schneid Lewis, *Family way*, p. 32-3.

⁷⁵⁷ Esther Chichester to Stephen Grehan, 1 Dec. 1882, IE/BL/EP/G/690.

flower.⁷⁵⁸ For the guests, there were printed booklets on white card with silver ink, but Ethel had her own, white leather-bound book, in which she carefully recorded the day and the celebrant. Within its pages she dried a sprig of orange blossom from her bouquet – itself a symbol of innocence, eternal love, fruitfulness and marriage.⁷⁵⁹ By dressing in this way, and by preserving solid reminders of her wedding day – from the orange blossom to her husband's tie and a slice of cake in a silver box – she was creating the mementos of a love-struck bride.⁷⁶⁰ Ethel deemed her marriage to Lucius so important that when she wrote down her terse memories of her life, the first event she recorded was the date of her engagement, followed by that of her wedding.⁷⁶¹ Lucius' mother, who died prematurely in 1868, also preserved her wedding bouquet. It could be taken as a sign that her husband thought very fondly of her that the bouquet was not destroyed after her death, or his remarriage, but was kept for posterity.⁷⁶²

Perhaps the reason why aristocratic weddings, described by Schneid-Lewis, in the early part of the nineteenth century, were such low key affairs was because the position of unrivalled power held by the landed class in society had yet to be seriously challenged, it was not necessary to use weddings as a statement of social position.⁷⁶³ Ethel's point de Venise lace was obviously expensive and was suggestive of wealth and tradition and the 'Gainsborough' style of the bridesmaids' dresses with their 'Marie Antoinette fichus' harked back to the eighteenth-century zenith of aristocratic power.⁷⁶⁴ For the wedding, Mrs Foster, Ethel's widowed mother, entertained 100 guests at Moor Park, and a fifty-foot by thirty-foot wooden structure, lavishly decorated with 'crimson velvet and gold...eight long

⁷⁵⁸ 'Marriage Supplement', *The Court Journal and Fashionable Gazette*, 18 Jan. 1896, NLI/MS/45,527/3.

⁷⁵⁹ NLI/MS/45,472/2; a widow was not to have any orange blossom, *Manners and rules*, p. 134,137.

⁷⁶⁰ NLI/MS/45,743.

⁷⁶¹ *Journal*, NLI/MS/14,742.

⁷⁶² NLI/MS/45,743.

⁷⁶³ Schneid-Lewis, pp. 32-3.

⁷⁶⁴ *Court Journal, Lady's Pictorial*, 18 Jan. 1896, NLI/MS/45,527/3.

mirrors...236 light chandeliers...252 niphum candles...[and] wall-ottomans,' was erected for the tenants.⁷⁶⁵

The Ireland Ethel moved to was not as politically stable as it had been in the early years of this study. Both she and her husband were firmly opposed to Home Rule.⁷⁶⁶ The imagery of the wedding highlighted these families' support for the survival of the Union. The motif of the intertwined shamrock and rose were repeatedly used; on banners and on the decorative icing of the cake.⁷⁶⁷ These details indicate that this wedding was not just the religious and legal event which all weddings at the time were, but also a carefully orchestrated political statement suggesting that the Inchiquins were the rightful holders of power, and that the Union of Great Britain and Ireland was as strong as the marital union of the new couple.

By the time of this marriage in 1896, successive acts had eroded the landlords' power. David Cannadine has observed that Shropshire, where Moor Park was located, was one of the more conservative counties in England, and the respect of the local people still seems to have been enjoyed by the Fosters, as the local newspaper made clear:

A red-letter day has to be recorded in the annals of Richard's Castle [Shropshire village where this wedding took place]. The marriage of the Hon. Lucius W. O'Brien, eldest son of Lord Inchiquin, to Miss Ethel J. Foster, eldest daughter of the late Major Foster, which was solemnised on Tuesday last, marks an event which will ever be remembered by those who witnessed it, no less as a brilliant spectacle than for the opportunity it afforded the residents of demonstrating in a manner, which cannot be otherwise than gratifying the respectful esteem in which Mrs Foster and her family are regarded in the neighbourhood.⁷⁶⁸

Residents outdid each other in making banners and suitably loyal displays for their houses. Ethel was the heiress of Moor Park, and it was hoped, by some residents at least, that she

⁷⁶⁵ *Ludlow Advertiser*, 18 Jan, 1896, NLI/MS/45,527/2.

⁷⁶⁶ Ethel was a member of the Primrose League, NLI/MS/45,502/1, Ethel, Lady Inchiquin to 15th Baron Inchiquin, 18 Sept. 1914, NLI/MS/45,504/8.

⁷⁶⁷ *Ludlow Advertiser*, 18 Jan, 1896, NLI/MS/45,527/2.

⁷⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

would live on in the area as a leading figure.⁷⁶⁹ Such displays of loyalty and deference to the couple were not limited to their English tenantry. The Corofin, Co. Clare, tenantry raised money to buy expensive gifts and an old representative made a pre-prepared speech to welcome the couple.⁷⁷⁰

As with the coming of age ceremonies described by Kevin McKenna, and discussed in Chapter one, accounts of the wedding in various newspapers were so similar that a degree of control must have been exercised by the family. The detailed account of each individual gift, and the exact description of the mother-of-the-bride's 'dress of rich purple and black shot silk, with bodice of purple velvet, the sleeves handsomely studded with black jet' suggests that details of the day were sent to the press by the family, or that a reporter was invited to inspect the dress, and the 'over 400 presents'.⁷⁷¹ Some publications gave the name of suppliers, which could mean that bakers and others connected to the wedding trade sent out information to the press.⁷⁷² Likewise the 'verbatim' address given to the bride and groom by the Corofin tenants must have been sent to the press in a carefully arranged demonstration of the near feudal relationship between the Inchiquins and their tenants.⁷⁷³

This public significance is not to take away from the personal importance which the wedding held for Ethel. Marriage was a greater turning point in a woman's life than it was for her husband. The gifts received by Ethel were of a different nature than those received by Lucius. While he was presented with a near limitless supply of cigarette cases, which were essentially private items, Ethel received numerous display items, both for her own

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid. and press cutting n.d. or provenance, NLI/MS/45,527/2.

⁷⁷⁰ *Clare and Limerick Advocate*, [March/April] 1896, described proposed gifts, NLI/MS/45,503/1. *Clare Record*, 5 Sept 1896, NLI/MS/45,527/2. Lord and Lady Fiingall had an equally extravagant welcome on their return from honeymoon. Hinkson, *Seventy years young*, p. 95.

⁷⁷¹ *Ludlow Advertiser*, *Hereford Journal*, *Black and White*, *The Queen*, *Lady's Pictorial*, *Court Circular*, *Court Gazette*, and other unidentifiable clippings, 18 Jan. 1896, NLI/MS/45,527/2, all gave extended or abridged versions of the same report.

⁷⁷² *Ludlow Advertiser*, NLI/MS/45,527/2.

⁷⁷³ *Clare Record*, 5 Sept 1896, NLI/MS/45,527/2.

body and for her future home. Her husband gave her, among other things, an emerald and diamond ring and a gold O'Brien knot, which was a design motif originally found on a stone fireplace in one of the family's castles. From her mother she received an 'emerald and diamond pendant, emerald and diamond bracelet, diamond star'; and from her sister a 'pearl and diamond bracelet'.⁷⁷⁴ Her step-mother-in-law, Lady Inchiquin gave her a 'diamond and silver enamelled watch'. For her future home, she received a number of silver and other display pieces.⁷⁷⁵ Such gifts were extremely valuable.⁷⁷⁶ These jewellery pieces would mark out Ethel as a married woman. It was deemed appropriate that 'the dress of a young matron... be somewhat richer than that of an unmarried girl.'⁷⁷⁷ When Esther Grehan was preparing for her marriage during the autumn of 1882, her fiancé bought her a gift of lace, because, as she explained to him, 'Girls don't wear it but it is the correct thing for married ladies to have some – it gives a certain cachet of matronliness which it will be seemly for your wife to have.'⁷⁷⁸ This lace could then be passed down through the generations to be worn on wedding days, to mark the passage of a 'girl' to a 'wife'.⁷⁷⁹

Impact on family

When a woman made the transition in status from sister and daughter to wife, her social circle changed. Esther Grehan commented, without any apparent regret, that she would drop most of her correspondents when she got married, as 'it would take up too much time', and he might want 'his little wife to chat'.⁷⁸⁰ In a speech, at the wedding of a relation of Ethel, Lady Inchiquin, it was hoped that the bride 'may find, if possible for her to find,

⁷⁷⁴ *Ludlow Advertiser, Herford Journal*, 18 Jan 1896, NLI/MS/45,527/2.

⁷⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷⁶ E. Kehoe, *Fortune's daughters*, p. 128.

⁷⁷⁷ Anon., *All about etiquette: or the manners of polite society: for ladies, gentlemen, and families*. (London, 1875), pp. 280-281.

⁷⁷⁸ Esther Chichester to Stephen Grehan, 30 Nov. [1882], BL/EP/G/689.

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Esther's daughter wore the same lace for her wedding in 1922, Stephen Grehan, diary entry, BL/EP/B/776.

⁷⁸⁰ E. Chichester to S. Grehan, 1 Dec. 1883, IE/BL/EP/G/690.

more dear and sincere friends than those whom she has left behind.’⁷⁸¹ This break also extended to family. Lady Elizabeth Leigh was the eldest, and favourite daughter, of the 3rd Earl of Bantry; their relationship was so close that neither could greet her engagement without some remorse.⁷⁸² She appears to have spent much of her honeymoon occupied in writing to her parents, and still missed them after several years of marriage.⁷⁸³ Her father-in-law-to-be wrote to her father, that he understood the terrible loss suffered, when one’s daughter was taken in marriage.⁷⁸⁴

Unsurprisingly, then, the news of a friend’s engagement could be met with some sadness. Emily Fitzpatrick wrote to Mary O’Brien that she ‘was sorry and glad: sorry – I don’t know why – I suppose because you are going out of the unmarried cousinhood & sorry for the others’.⁷⁸⁵ Shortly after her marriage, Mary wrote philosophically to her mother about Theo, her elder sister: ‘I see her [photograph] very often & it wrings my heart, though I know she will soon console herself as she has Lucy (another sister), whose disposition is I believe more attractive to her, though circumstances have bound her strongly to me. I hope I am spoken of with tenderness & indulgence, like the dead!’⁷⁸⁶ The potentially shattering effects of a sister’s marriage can be most clearly seen in Gertrude Foster’s letters to her newly married sister Ethel, Lady Inchiquin. As the second sister, Gertrude even had to acclimatise to a new name when her sister married; she was now Miss Foster rather than the familiar ‘Miss Gertrude’.⁷⁸⁷ Ethel and Gertrude’s elder sister had died young, so Gertrude was conscious of the ‘special tie between two sisters, where there are only two: they seem to grow into each other more than when there are many.’

⁷⁸¹ ‘Speech made by Mr Samuel Groves, of Upper House, Alderbury, at luncheon for 220 guests at Aldebury School room to celebrate wedding of Miss M. G. Leighton and Mr Algernon E. Perkins, at Loton Park.’ Newspaper clipping April 9th 1890, NLI/MS/45,524/2.

⁷⁸² Countess of Bantry to 3rd Earl Bantry, 12 May 1874, IE/BL/EP/B/2395.

⁷⁸³ Elizabeth Leigh to Earl Bantry, 3 Sept. 1874, IE/BL/EP/B/2441, [n.d.] Oct./Nov. 1874, IE/BL/EP/B/2443, Elizabeth Gore to Countess Bantry, n.d. [Oct. 1800], IE/BL/EP/B/2412/17.

⁷⁸⁴ Col. Egerton Leigh to 3rd Earl Bantry, 7 May 1874, IE/BL/EP/B/2341.

⁷⁸⁵ Emily Fitzpatrick to Mary Spring-Rice, 27 June, 1863, NLI/MS/36,769.

⁷⁸⁶ Mary O’Brien to Ellen Spring-Rice, 14 Sept. 1863, NLI/MS/36,758/2.

⁷⁸⁷ Gertrude Foster to Ethel, Lady Inchiquin, 22 Jan. 1896, NLI/MS/45,503/1.

She knew that ‘sometimes when one marries, there seems to be a division, an engrossing in the new life, or sometimes the husband does not care to have others in the same circle & wants to keep his wife all to himself.’ Perhaps Gertrude was so happy to have Lucius as a brother-in-law because she sensed she could trust him; ‘we need not fear this as Lucius is so good & open hearted & is ready to take others in to share his joy.’⁷⁸⁸ Gertrude wore a necklace given to her by her sister as she wrote:

I feel I still have your old love & our knowledge of each other when I wear it day & night. It is a little charm to keep our love is’nt [sic] it my Packers? We mustn’t lose that even though we are away from each other.⁷⁸⁹

Gertrude found it difficult to accept that Ethel was now a wife, rather than a sister.

She desired constant communication and her letters during her sister’s honeymoon were almost invasive, and extremely long. She wished to know all their doings. She wrote to Ethel that their mother looked for a letter from her every day, and mother and daughter timed a trip to London to see the new couple off on their European travels.⁷⁹⁰ Having said goodbye in London, they sent a telegram to Calais, and a letter on to Rome to greet the pair on their arrival, and to remind them of their love.⁷⁹¹ In later letters, Gertrude wrote of her sadness, and how she had taken it upon herself to press her sister’s wedding bouquet.⁷⁹² Gertrude had no immediate reason to fear losing her sister, as contact and correspondence was kept up between the sisters until the 1930s.⁷⁹³ Mothers and sisters would go to the newly-wed when the time came for her to have her first child, and unmarried sisters might stay with the couple for extended periods.⁷⁹⁴

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid., 21 Jan. 1896.

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid., 21, 22 Jan, 7, 9 Feb. 1896.

⁷⁹¹ Ibid., 7 Feb. 19 Mar. 1896.

⁷⁹² Ibid., 21 Jan. 1896.

⁷⁹³ Ibid.,

⁷⁹⁴ Mary O’Brien to Lucy Gwynn, 12 June 1864, NLI/MS/36,768, Edward O’Brien to Charlotte Grace O’Brien, Aug. 29 1867, 13 Jan. 1868, NLI/MS/36,270/1, Mabel O’Brien to Julia O’Brien, 24th January 1903, NLI/MS/36,795/2, for example.

The change in relationship brought about by a sister or daughter's marriage sometimes had the opposite effect on her family. Mary, Lady Carbery recorded returning to her childhood home for her sister's wedding. She had numerous siblings and was clearly not overly close to this particular one. She looked on the bridegroom as 'a Universal Benefactor,' as 'It is the tragic truth that not one soul, rich or poor, laments her departure, not one will miss her.'⁷⁹⁵ Katherine Everett's aunt went further, when asked why she never communicated with her nieces and nephews: "'we were so thankful, my dear, to get rid of your mother," she had explained, "that we all decided to have nothing to do with her or her vipers."⁷⁹⁶ Everett, who had little sympathy for her 'neurotic' mother, Catherine, could see that the marriage had been a disaster, and reported that her mother had been urged to marry a man 'with whom she had not a thought or a taste in common' as her parents were 'happy that she should marry anyone, even a man more than twice her age.'⁷⁹⁷

A woman's marriage to the heir of a landed estate meant that she would eventually move into his family home, where his parents and siblings might still be in residence. It was, therefore, of the utmost importance that good relations were established between the bride and her in-laws. *Manners and Rules* recommended that the bridegroom-elect's mother 'should write to the bride-elect expressing their approval of the event'. It was also recommended that each partner should be invited to stay at their betrothed's country house for a period of time.⁷⁹⁸ The groom's female relations played a major role in facilitating their relationship, and in welcoming the new bride into their family. As we have seen, Mary O'Brien used her correspondence with her suitor's sister, Lucy, to keep the possibility of second proposal alive. Once Mary was engaged to Edward, she developed her relationship with Lucy. By the time they were married, a few months

⁷⁹⁵ *West Cork Journal*, p. 120.

⁷⁹⁶ Everett, *Bricks*, p. 17.

⁷⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁷⁹⁸ *Manners and rules*, pp. 251, 250.

later, Mary was signing off her letters 'your very affectionate sister'.⁷⁹⁹ Edward also made efforts with his new in-laws and requested permission to address Ellen Spring-Rice as 'mother', a right that was reluctantly granted at first.⁸⁰⁰

Mabel O'Brien made a concerted effort to develop a rapport with her new in-laws, and really appreciated the efforts made by her step-mother-in-law to put her at ease. Shortly after her engagement she wrote:

My dear new Mother, Why are you all so good to me? I can't understand it a bit...I remember very well the first time I ever saw you, at St. Columba's ages ago, and then afterwards you were all that was kind and nice to me when I went to Cahirmoyle, feeling myself a very small & terrified person. It is delightful to think that I may now come quite close to you, and that you are really willing to let me have a share in Dermod's heart. I wonder when I shall see you, it is hard to write down what one feels on paper and to see stupid black & white words staring me out of countenance when I should like to look into your eyes & tell you everything without any word at all. That good day will come, and in the mean-time I shall believe that you really are quite near & in full sympathy with both of us. I only wish I were half a quarter good enough for D. Please give my love to all my new relations.⁸⁰¹

For some women, meeting the in-laws could be an intimidating experience. After her first encounter with Stephen's father, Esther Grehan wrote: 'I was feeling so dismal and frightened that your Father might prevent you having anything more to say to me.'⁸⁰² Later letters show that relations between the young wife and her father-in-law were strained.⁸⁰³

Married life

Once the couple were married, they embarked on honeymoon. A common practice was to spend some time in England, as Ethel and Lucius did in a borrowed house in Cornwall, before embarking on more extensive travels in Europe.⁸⁰⁴ Switzerland, the South of France

⁷⁹⁹ Mary O'Brien to Lucy Gwynn, 6 Oct, 1863, NLI/MS/36,768.

⁸⁰⁰ Mary O'Brien to Ellen Spring-Rice, 14 Sept. 1863, NLI/MS/36,758/2 and Edward O'Brien to Ellen Spring-Rice, 1 Oct. 1863, NLI/MS/36,754.

⁸⁰¹ Mabel O'Brien to Julia O'Brien, 10 Dec. 1901, NLI/MS/36,795/1.

⁸⁰² Esther Chichester to Stephen Grehan September 22 1882, BL/EP/G/656.

⁸⁰³ Esther Grehan to Stephen Grehan, 24 Jan 1883, IE/BL/EP/G/698; 24 Nov., 1 Dec., 1885, IE/BL/EP/G/700,704.

⁸⁰⁴ Gertrude Foster to Ethel, Lady Inchiquin, 21, 22 Jan 1896, NLI/MS/45,503/1. Elizabeth and Egerton Leigh stayed in Southampton for a while, 7 Aug. 2440, NLI/MS/2440.

and Italy were all popular destinations amongst these couples.⁸⁰⁵ Many genuinely enjoyed this new time alone together and Edward O'Brien wrote to his unmarried sister, shortly after his marriage: 'Now you will expect me to say I am very happy: & I don't like to say so, because you will not understand how much beyond my expectations the reality is.'⁸⁰⁶

The roles required of married woman outlined in Chapter one were best facilitated by husbands that were companionate and respectful, and both partners relied on the other to assist them in their duties. The majority of marriages in this sample were of that kind. Esther and Stephen Grehan seem to have been the best of friends, and spent most of their time together.⁸⁰⁷ Edward O'Brien thanked his second wife Julia for making his life so easy, by managing things so well at home.⁸⁰⁸ The Earl and Countess of Bantry might not have been fervently in love, but they certainly shared a devotion to their children, and worked together to ensure the greatest possible success of their family.⁸⁰⁹ Twentieth-century couples like Ethel and Lucius Inchiquin, and Dermod and Mabel O'Brien, worked together to preserve the estate finances as best they could. Not all relationships were quite so equitable.

Divorce was not widely used between 1860 and 1915, although the half-sister of Lucius O'Brien, and Katherine Everett were both divorced from their husbands just after the period. Neither of these had married landlords, so perhaps it was less difficult for them to divorce. Other married women in the sample lived with difficult situations. Viscountess Doneraile spent most of the day apart from her husband while in London.⁸¹⁰ After all of the

⁸⁰⁵ Assorted tickets from the honeymoon of Ethel and Lucius, Lord and Lady Inchiquin, 1896, 45,527/4; corr. Edward O'Brien to Lucy and Charlotte Grace O'Brien, NLI/MS/36,751 and NLI/MS/36/751/1; and Mary O'Brien to Ellen Spring-Rice, 1863, NLI/MS/36/758/2; corr. Elizabeth Leigh to Earl and Countess Bantry, 1874, IE/BL/EP/2441-7.

⁸⁰⁶ Edward O'Brien to Charlotte O'Brien, 13 Sept 1863 NLI/MS/36,750.

⁸⁰⁷ Esther Grehan, diary entries, 8,9,11, Jan., 1898, IE/BL/EP/G/843. Stephen Grehan, diary entries, 9,12,14,16,17 Jan., 1884, IE/BL/EP/G/739.

⁸⁰⁸ Edward O'Brien to Julia Marshall, n.d., NLI/MS/36,771.

⁸⁰⁹ Corr. Countess of Bantry to Earl Bantry, 1874-1876, IE/BL/EP/B/2395-2400.

⁸¹⁰ Viscountess Doneraile to Lord Castletown, 9 Apr 1876, R1, Bisbrooke.

intrigue surrounding the engagement of Mary and Edward O'Brien, it took some time to get used to married life. Mary did not eat during the first weeks,⁸¹¹ and less than two weeks after his marriage, before they had properly embarked on honeymoon to Europe, Edward wrote to his mother-in-law in an anxious state. He was afraid that he did not really know the person he had married, and feared for their future happiness. Perhaps he was unaware before their marriage that Mary was prone to bouts of depression:⁸¹²

I am extremely sorry that I should be compelled to write to you so soon after my marriage...I should think it better as a general rule that husband and wife should arrange their own differences without the intervention of a third person however dear to either: but in this particular case I have determined to break through my principle, because I trust that a word from you spoken in time may prevent much unhappiness to both Mary & myself –

You will understand in what way I wish you to use your influence with my wife: when I tell you that between the hour 11am & 4pm today she has applied the following objectionable unkind unladylike unchristian terms to me[:]

Bad
Wicked
Tiresome
Stupid
Silly
Intolerable
Absurd
Greedy
Foolish
Nasty
Wicked
Unkind

And be it remembered that these were not left off in rapid succession & upon strong provocation; but are delivered slowly, with deliberation, and at even intervals as to all each shot to tell with full effect? Can you do anything for me? I love Mary truly, & there is much about her that I like – but I really am not prepared to submit tamely to such treatment every day.⁸¹³

Their relationship had not fully settled a month into the marriage, and he again felt compelled to write:

⁸¹¹ Edward O'Brien to Ellen Spring-Rice, 1 Oct. 1863, NLI/MS/36,754.

⁸¹² Mary O'Brien to Mrs Monsell, 1863, Mary O'Brien to Lucy Gwynn, 12 June 1864, NLI/MS/36,768. Mary O'Brien to Ellen Spring-Rice, 29 July 1863, NLI/MS/36,758/2.

⁸¹³ Edward O'Brien to Ellen Spring-Rice, 19 Sept. 1863, NLI/MS/36,754.

I fear from allusions which I see in the letters from M[ount]t Trenchard, that Mary sends home a very bad character of me. I know that I am not what I ought to be: but I hope you will find that I am not quite so bad as she represents me: & perhaps if I were to try to remember all her sins I might make up a very respectable catalogue.⁸¹⁴

None of Mary's surviving letters speaks of Edward in derogatory terms, possibly because he did not choose to keep them, but evidence suggests that their relationship improved during their extended honeymoon, and their marriage was affectionate, for most of the time, until her death five years later.

Conclusion

The important part family and society played in securing marriage partners for the women in this sample might suggest that women were heavily controlled in their choice of spouse. The near constant flow of eminently suitable matches would suggest that young girls were pressured into marrying their parents' choice of partner, in order to fulfil some great dynastic plan. This was not the case, and there is no evidence of women going unwillingly to the altar. Any control that was exercised by family was used subliminally, and was probably unnoticed by everyone concerned. Indeed, the only complaint that issued with any regularity from these women's pens at least was about the arrangement of their trousseaux.⁸¹⁵ Each woman was herself aware of the importance of economic and social considerations when choosing a mate. She aimed, with the assistance of her family, and the existing social mores, to meet, and get to know, a man who could meet both economic and emotional criteria. A woman was not bartered for land or titles, without her family ensuring that she would gain as much as possible from the transaction for herself, and her future children. Everyone involved shared the same goal; a happy, economically sound couple who could fulfil their duties to land and estate. Yet marriage had one very important aspect for a woman, which it did not have for her husband: it was only through marriage

⁸¹⁴ Ibid., 1 Oct. 1863.

⁸¹⁵ Mabel O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, Mary O'Brien to Lucy Gwynn, 11 July 1863, NLI/MS/36,768, Mary O'Brien to Ellen Spring-Rice, 27 June, 29 July, 1863, NLI/MS/36,758/2.

that a woman could be considered fully adult. So while legally on marriage they ceased to exist (before the married women's property acts), socially they gained prestige and power. The wedding day was a period of transition for women, from dependent to adult. With such attractions it might be the case that some women 'learned to love' in order to gain a more impressive position in society. Mabel O'Brien wrote to her fiancé of her single life: 'To do nothing for half one's time and rest the other half does not seem a sufficient reason for existence.'⁸¹⁶ Nine months after her wedding, Mabel would give birth to a son. She had already completed the primary duty of a landed wife, and could devote the rest of her life to the care of her children, and the management of the family establishment. In a very short time she was transformed from a dependant woman living in her father's household, to someone who had fulfilled what was widely seen as her vocation; she had become a mother. Such achievements could only be won through marriage to a suitable man.

⁸¹⁶ Mabel O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, 5 Feb. 1902, NLI/MS/36,699/3.



Fig. 30: Egerton and Lady Elizabeth Leigh n.d., Bantry Collection IE/BL/EP/B/3463.



Fig. 31: William, 3rd Earl Bantry, Elizabeth [or Ina], Jane, Countess Bantry, Ina [or Jane], 4th Earl Bantry, Olive, Lady Ardilaun, Lord Ardilaun. n.d. reproduced in Everett, *Bricks and Flowers*.



Fig. 32: Group photograph at the wedding of Ethel Foster and Lucius the future Baron Inchiquin, 1896. NLI/MS/45,739/2.



Fig. 33: Bridal party at the wedding of Ethel Foster and Lucius the future Baron Inchiquin, 1896. NLI/MS/45,739/2.

Chapter Four: Childbearing and Motherhood

Introduction

She occupies herself principally in sleeping – no wonder having been made to awaken & enter the world a fortnight before she intended it. But she is plump & lusty & roars, when she does commit that enormity, in a way to satisfy the most anxious enquiries as to the strength of her lungs & body generally. As to her looks you know Lucy one can't say whether one's own baby is pretty or ugly – but I did think her a very promising piece of goods when at first I was unfamiliar enough with her face to be critical ...They, the impartial public before Baby has yet appeared think her delightful – pretty – intelligent – charming & are ready to devour her at the earliest opportunity.⁸¹⁷

So wrote Mary O' Brien in June 1864, shortly after the birth of her eldest child, a daughter, Nelly. Mary had proved her fertility by giving birth just ten months after her wedding day, and almost a year to the day since she had become engaged to Edward O'Brien. Motherhood gave her great joy, and Mary and her husband do not seem to have tried to limit or space out their family, despite her failing health. She gave birth to a son in 1865 and another daughter in 1866. In March 1867, when she was already weakened by the tuberculosis that would kill her the following year, and doctors had prescribed 'a more or less invalid life', she wondered to her mother if she 'shall ever have another baby.'⁸¹⁸ Despite the well-known dangers of childbirth women wanted to conceive children, and planned for motherhood before they were even married.⁸¹⁹

⁸¹⁷ Mary O' Brien to Lucy Gwynn, 12 June, 1864, NLI/MS/36,768.

⁸¹⁸ Mary O'Brien to Ellen Spring Rice, 9 March, 1867, NLI/MS/36,758 2; O.M. Loto and I. Awowole, 'Tuberculosis in pregnancy: a review', *Journal of Pregnancy*, Vol. 2012, <http://www.hindawi.com/journals/jp/2012/379271/> accessed on 1 Sept. 2013; '[U]ntreated active TB is a significant risk to maternal health. Therefore, pregnancy in patients with untreated active TB should be considered high-risk' (F. B. Rigby, 'Tuberculosis and pregnancy: update on an old nemesis', *Infect. Med.* Vol. 17 No. 4, 2000, pp. 284-288, 285). See also NHS Health Protection Agency, 'Pregnancy and tuberculosis information for clinicians', Jan. 2012, http://www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1194947408879 accessed on 1 Sept. 2013.

⁸¹⁹ Emily, Lady Inchiquin, notebook with knitting patterns for baby clothes, 1857, NLI/MS/45,399/1.

Procreation was essential to the survival of the class. Estates were ideally passed from father to legitimate son, in a seamless transition of family power. A wife's central duty was to provide such heirs. When the Duchess of Marlborough married in 1895, she was told by her mother-in-law: 'Your first duty is to have a child and it must be a son.'⁸²⁰ The women in this Munster sample were aware of their duty, and they were proud to fulfil it. Yet they also had children for more personal reasons, and did not stop once an heir was produced. Many were in loving relationships and, as methods of contraception, aside from abstinence, were not yet reliable, it was to be expected that most women would conceive shortly into married life. While fathers were eager to secure an heir, they often valued the health and happiness of their wives above their desire for children. Mothers were tender and loving towards their children, and many breastfed their own babies. Yet they were not especially hands-on mothers, and were well able to separate their role as mother from those of wife, hostess, household manager and philanthropist. Their love for their children was strong, but it was rational and pragmatic, and they did not have any qualms about delegating the physical care of their children to carefully selected staff.

Fertility

The period c.1860-1914 saw many changes which affected the lives of women. As important as any change for the women of the landed class was the fertility revolution which took place. Family sizes halved during this period among wealthier families.⁸²¹ Falling child mortality rates meant that it was no longer necessary to have as many children to ensure an heir would outlive his father, and increasing financial pressure may have encouraged families

⁸²⁰ J. Schneid Lewis, *Family way*, 60-61.

⁸²¹ A. McLaren, *A history of contraception: from antiquity to the present day* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 178-9.

to focus their existing wealth on a smaller number of children.⁸²² In Judith Schneid Lewis' study of childbearing practices among the British aristocracy for the century 1750-1850, large families were common. Women married early, and the median childbearing span 'was eighteen years, resulting in the production of about eight children each'.⁸²³ The most famously quoted example of near-continuous pregnancy during that period was Emily, Duchess of Leinster (1731-1814), who gave birth to twenty-one children, by two husbands, over a thirty-one-year span.⁸²⁴ Many of the men and women in this sample were the children of early nineteenth-century unions, and had been born into large families. Mary O'Brien's mother gave birth to at least ten children; Esther Grehan was one of nine; Jane, Countess of Bantry was the youngest of six, but as her father died prematurely, before she was born, there is every reason to expect that she might have had more siblings.⁸²⁵ The highest number of children born to a couple, among marriages which took place after 1858, was that of Ellen, Lady Inchiquin, who married in 1874, and gave birth to ten children in twenty years, the first five of whom were born in consecutive years, from 1875 to 1879 (Her husband had already fathered four children by his first wife who died shortly after the birth of her last child).⁸²⁶ Despite this throw-back to early nineteenth-century habits, family sizes generally decreased.

Of the twenty-three marriages of landlords in this sample that took place between 1858 and 1914, twenty produced children, giving an average of 3.65 children per fertile union. Most couples had fewer than five children, and in the second half of the sample, where marriages took place after 1887, two children was the preferred family size. Sixty-five per cent

⁸²² L. Davidoff et.al., *The family story: blood, contract and intimacy, 1830-1960* (London, 1999), p. 129-30.

⁸²³ J. Schneid Lewis, *Family way: childbearing in the British aristocracy, 1760-1860* (New Jersey, 1986), p. 123.

⁸²⁴ Ibid. p. 239.

⁸²⁵ 'Herbert', *Burke's landed gentry*.

⁸²⁶ 'Inchiquin', *Burke's peerage and baronetage*.

of first children were born within a year of marriage, with many conceived on honeymoon, and the average time lapse before the birth of the first child, in twenty landlord marriages, was 1.5 years. The longest delay, before a child was born, was in the marriage of George Ryan of Inch and his second wife Mary Power-Lalor. This couple did not produce a child until the fourth year of marriage, but had another child a year later in 1888.⁸²⁷ This general, almost immediate conception of children upon marriage suggests that both partners saw the production of an heir as a vital aspect of their union.

Table 7: Number of Children born to women of the landed class, 1858-1914

	1-5 children born	6-10 children born	10+ children born	Unspecified number
Wife of Munster landlord	12	3	0	0
Total sample landed women known to marry during period	18	5	1	10

Source: *Burke's Peerage, Burke's Landed Gentry*

Second and third children quickly followed the first; suggesting that couples enjoyed healthy sex lives, but disliked, or were unaware of, the available contraceptive methods. The rate of births fell dramatically as the marriage continued. This could be read in one of two ways. Either the couple were no longer compelled by family duty to be sexually active with each other, or, as was more likely, they continued to have sex, but made a conscious decision to stop producing children. This is suggestive of the affection between couples, as neither wanted the wife to go through the burden of excessive pregnancies.

Couples limited, rather than spaced their family size. They only invested in contraception, or abstinence, once the wife had been through a number of pregnancies, and

⁸²⁷ A. P. Burke (ed.), *A genealogical and heraldic history of the landed gentry of Ireland by Sir Bernard Burke, Ulster King of Arms*, 10th edition (London, 1904), p. 529.

was, perhaps, deemed to be aging or weakened slightly, and when they had produced enough children to safeguard the future of the estate. Fertility studies generally take the age of forty-five as the average age of completed fertility for women.⁸²⁸ If this was the case for the women in this sample, then almost all couples limited their family size in some way. Women were often still in their thirties when they gave birth for the last time. Jane White, Countess of Bantry, gave birth to her last child in 1857, at the age of thirty-five.⁸²⁹ Arethusa Hawker, who married Jane's grandson, Edward Leigh-White, in 1904, gave birth in 1905 and again in 1906, but had no more children in her sixteen further years of married life.⁸³⁰ Only Ellen, Lady Inchiquin gave birth in her third decade of marriage.

Writing on the use of contraception in Finland, during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Kari Pitkänen opened with an anecdote about a Finnish nobleman, who, having fathered nine children, moved his bed out of the bedroom which he had shared with his wife, and replaced it with the beds of two of his young daughters. His method of controlling his family size was simple: abstinence.⁸³¹ Angus McLaren has suggested that it is likely that upper class couples practised abstinence and marital continence as a means of limiting family size. 'It was estimated that only 16 per cent of English couples who married before 1910 used mechanical contraceptives.'⁸³² The married couples in this sample could have afforded to use the expensive condoms, spermicides, and pessaries which were on the market; however, they may not have wanted to use them. Complete abstinence was the only sure way to avoid

⁸²⁸ C. Ó Gráda, M. Anderson, 'Fertility decline in Scotland, England and Wales, and Ireland: comparisons from the 1911 census of fertility', *Population studies*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Mar. 1998), pp. 1-20:12.

⁸²⁹ C. Quinn, Bantry Estate Collection List, BL/EP/B.

⁸³⁰ 'White', B. Burke, *Burke's Irish family records*, (London, 1976).

⁸³¹ K. Pitkänen, 'Contraception in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Finland,' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, xxxiv: 2 (Autumn, 2003), 187-207: p. 187.

⁸³² Royal commission on population, *Papers*, 1949, I, and *Report on an enquiry into family limitation*, pp. 7-8, tables 2, 5, 7. Quoted in A. McLaren, *A history of contraception: from antiquity to the present day*, p. 186.

unwanted pregnancies. Female fertility was not understood, and even those who supported the control of the number of children born to any one couple gave flawed advice, believing that menstruation signified women's fertile period, while they recommended that couples wishing to avoid conception should have sex during what we now know to be the most fertile stage.⁸³³

It is likely that these couples practised abstinence when they felt it necessary. At the time of her death in 1878, resulting from an over-dose of chloral⁸³⁴, Lady Elizabeth Leigh was in the habit of sleeping in a separate room.⁸³⁵ She had married in 1874, and gave birth in 1875 to a girl, and in 1876 to a boy. The birth of her last child nearly killed her, and it is unlikely that she, and her husband, would have wanted her to go through another pregnancy. It is possible that she suffered from tuberculosis, as she had undergone dramatic weight-loss.⁸³⁶ It is probable that marital relations had ceased between the couple. Other couples abstained from sex when deemed necessary. A few weeks after their marriage, Esther wrote to Stephen from Paris that she was 'delighted to think there is another day nearly over, nearer to seeing you!' and yet, she suggested: 'I tell you what[,] when you come here we must do like the French and have separate beds[,] you & I would never fit into mine- it is small with a big hollow.'⁸³⁷ Stephen referred to 'Esther's room' and 'her bedroom' when Esther was recovering from the effects of childbirth.⁸³⁸ As both partners commented on sleeping apart, it is unlikely to have been their normal pattern, and they were certainly sharing a bed as late as 1898, when Esther

⁸³³ McLaren, *A history of contraception*, p. 187; Oedipus, [T.J. Haslam] *The marriage problem* (Dublin, 1868).

⁸³⁴ 'a hypnotic and anæsthetic,' *Oxford English Dictionary*, Online edition, accessed on 13 Sept. 2013.

⁸³⁵ Lord Ardilaun to Countess Bantry, 6 Oct. 1880, IE/BL/EP/B/2413.

⁸³⁶ Maude Leigh to Countess Bantry, 5 Oct. 1880, IE/BL/EP/B/2410.

⁸³⁷ Esther Grehan to Stephen Grehan, 23 Jan. 1883, IE/BL/EP/G/697.

⁸³⁸ Stephen Grehan, diary entry, 17 Feb., 1887. IE/BL/EP/G/741.

was thirty-eight, ill, and unlikely to have any more children.⁸³⁹ Mabel and Dermot O'Brien were also in the habit of sleeping together. He only moved to a bedroom downstairs when his wife was heavily pregnant, and returned to share her bed once her confinement was over.⁸⁴⁰ She shared this information with her mother-in-law, so in 1903, sleeping with one's spouse must have been considered commonplace. Still, it was the norm to provide couples with the option of sleeping separately. When Ellen, Lady Inchiquin was planning a house party in 1874, which would use all of her guest rooms, she allocated two rooms per couple.⁸⁴¹ The layout of the new house at Clonmeen, built in 1893, was also arranged to allow couples to have optional access to each other, after they retired for the evening.⁸⁴² However, separate rooms did not always mean a lack of sexual intercourse. The Leighs stayed in a two-bedroom apartment in Florence, while on honeymoon, but they conceived a child shortly after marriage.⁸⁴³ It is, nonetheless, certain that whether they used abstinence, or some form of mechanical contraception, the couples examined here controlled their family size, before the wife reached completed fertility.

Some couples were never faced with the challenge of limiting family size, as infertility denied them the heir required for the estate. It has been estimated that nineteen per cent of all aristocratic marriages were childless.⁸⁴⁴ Jessica Gerard has found that one in seven of the heirs in her sample 'who married wives of childbearing age remained childless,' and, like Lady Castletown and Ethel Lady Inchiquin, 'Sought-after heiresses typically came from ominously small families.'⁸⁴⁵ One-third of all childless widowers in her sample remarried, but half of these

⁸³⁹ Esther Grehan, diary entry, 11 Jan., 5 Apr. 1898, IE/BL/EP/G/843.

⁸⁴⁰ Mabel O'Brien to Julia O'Brien, 5 Jan. 1903, NLI/MS/36,795/2.

⁸⁴¹ Ellen, Lady Inchiquin to Baron Inchiquin, NLI/MS/ 45,473/2.

⁸⁴² Plan of Clonmeen, 1893, IE/BL/EP/B/374.

⁸⁴³ Lady Elizabeth Leigh to 3rd Earl Bantry, [Oct/Nov.] 1874, BL/EP/G/2443.

⁸⁴⁴ T.H. Hollingsworth, 'The demography of the British peerage' Supplement to *Population Studies*, 18, no.2, 1964, in Schneid Lewis *Family way*, p. 6.

⁸⁴⁵ J. Gerard, *Country house life*, p. 24, 25.

were disappointed for a second time.⁸⁴⁶ *Burke's Peerage* and *Landed Gentry* are littered with entries where a title or estate passed to the landlord's brother, nephew, or even to a more distant relation. This problem was visible in the White family of Bantry House.⁸⁴⁷ In 1868, William, the 3rd Earl of Bantry, succeeded his brother, who had died without producing an heir. William and his wife Jane had a family of five daughters and one son. All but one lived to adulthood and married. However, only two of these daughters produced children. Their son, the fourth Earl, died without issue in 1893, at the age of thirty-nine, after seven years of married life, but his widow went on to have a daughter with her second husband. Likewise, his sister Olive, who experienced a long and happy marriage, did not provide her husband, the first Baron Ardilaun, with an heir, and so his title became extinct. Another sister, Ina, also failed to produce an heir from her marriage to Earl Ferrers.⁸⁴⁸ A cousin remembered that Ina 'shrank away from' her husband, but it is unlikely that she completely neglected her marital duties, so it is probable that some genetic disorder affected this family.⁸⁴⁹ Such succession issues suggest that Schneid Lewis may be right in claiming that the aristocracy held onto power so successfully in the early nineteenth century through strength of numbers, and the large families they produced.⁸⁵⁰ As the century progressed, and family sizes shrank, children's deaths could have catastrophic results on lines of succession.

There has been some conjecture that fashionable tight-lacing of corsetry inhibited wealthy women's ability to carry a baby to full term.⁸⁵¹ Some medical professionals at the time

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 25, 24.

⁸⁴⁷ 'Bantry', *Burke's peerage and baronetage*.

⁸⁴⁸ 'Ferrers' *Burke's peerage and baronetage*.

⁸⁴⁹ Everett, *Bricks*, p. 42. Other Munster families who experienced fertility problems include, the Bandons of Bandon, Carberys of Castlefreke, Aldworths of Newmarket, Donerailes of Doneraile. All of these families had intermarried in some way.

⁸⁵⁰ J. Schneid Lewis, *Family way*, p. 218-9.

⁸⁵¹ For example Mell Davies, "Corsets and conception: fashion and demographic trends in the nineteenth century," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 24 (1982), pp. 611-41.

believed that tight-lacing could cause a prolapsed uterus.⁸⁵² This was especially problematic as fashionable skirts became narrower towards the end of the century, and so corsets needed to be pulled tighter in order to create the illusion of a tiny waist.⁸⁵³ Other doctors felt that tight-lacing was not a common practice in England, as the average paper pattern allowed a 'generous' twenty-five inch waist size.⁸⁵⁴ Photographs of the childless Olive Ardilaun depict a pale anaemic-looking woman with dark circles around her eyes and a small waist.⁸⁵⁵ (Fig. 31) However, corsetry alone did not have a detrimental effect on fertility. The extremely fertile Ellen, Lady Inchiquin wore a tightly laced corset in the photographs she kept in her album (Fig. 40). In some of these, she was in the early months of pregnancy. Women at the time were often depicted with extremely narrow waists in photography, but did not necessarily tie their corsets so tightly at all times.⁸⁵⁶ Mary O'Brien stopped wearing a corset altogether, shortly before the birth of her second child. She was surprised to find how comfortable she was without her stiff stays:

I never thought they could have caused so much of my discomfort, wearing them quite loose as I did; but I suppose the stiff springy steel fastenings in front pressed me somehow. Of course I look much worse figure than when the stays kept some straightness in my clothes: but I have a large round jacket of black silk which hides all outlines.⁸⁵⁷

Esther Grehan accepted the changes pregnancy made to her body and did not force herself into her pre-pregnancy clothes too soon. When she found her ball gown would not fit her, two-

⁸⁵² G. Hewitt M.D., 'The effect of tight lacing in producing flexions of the uterus,' *The British Medical Journal*, Jan. 1887, p. 122. See also P. Jalland and J. Hooper, *Women from birth to death- the female life cycle in Britain 1830-1914*, (Oxford, 1988), p. 113.

⁸⁵³ H. E. Roberts, 'The exquisite slave: the role of clothes in the making of the Victorian woman,' *Signs*, Vol. 2, No. 3, (Spring, 1977), 554-569: 562, 557; V. Steele, *The corset*, p. 46, 109.

⁸⁵⁴ Anon, 'Tight-lacing,' *The British Medical Journal*, Vol. 1, No 954 (Apr. 12, 1879), p. 559.

⁸⁵⁵ K. Everett, *Bricks and flowers*, Images p. 161; see also Bence-Jones, *Twilight*, p. 34.

⁸⁵⁶ V. Steele, *The corset*, p. 109.

⁸⁵⁷ Mary O'Brien to Ellen Spring Rice, 1 June 1866, NLI/MS/36,758/2.

and-one-half months after the birth of her fifth child, she simply wore a more comfortable dress.⁸⁵⁸ Two years after the birth of her sixth and last child, she was again able to achieve an impossibly small waist, which could rival fashion plates of the day (Fig. 34). Lady Carbery took great pride in her personal appearance. She was delighted, when her youngest child was over a year old, that she could report that her waist had returned to its pre-motherhood size of twenty-one inches outside her dress. She must have used her corset to substantially compress her body in order to squeeze into such a narrow dress, as she fainted at one dress fitting. She woke 'among the pins on the floor,' to find the fitters fanning her, and holding smelling salts to her nose.⁸⁵⁹ The reaction of the fitters was so immediate that they were obviously used to fashionable women fainting from tight clothing. Such constriction of Mary's body did not cause any problems with her reproductive organs, and she produced four healthy sons. Women's bodies may well have been healthier without tightly-bound corsets, but corsets rarely caused infertility as women loosened them as required.

Neither restrictive dress nor physical immobility could be blamed for the decrease in the number of children born to this class, as women managed their dress and could be physically fit while remaining within the bounds of propriety. It would be incorrect, however, to assume that all the women in this sample were healthy, active characters. There were cases of invalidism and possibly psychosomatic illnesses. Most notably, Katherine Everett's mother, Catherine, was never emotionally available for her children, according to her daughter, as 'possibly unhinged' and 'unable to bear pain, doctors gave her morphia injections or she would sometimes give them to herself.'⁸⁶⁰ Lady Carbery remembered that her grandmother was able

⁸⁵⁸ Esther Grehan, diary entry Sept. 13, 1893, Boole Library, BL/EP/G/838.

⁸⁵⁹ Sandford (ed.), *West Cork Journal*, p. 119.

⁸⁶⁰ Everett, *Bricks*, 16.

to rule the entire household using 'a long sad gaze from her forget-me-not eyes'.⁸⁶¹ Carbery had little patience for this attitude and derided a neighbour who acted in a similar fashion many years later.⁸⁶² These behaviours did not prevent them from bearing children. Any reflections written by those women who did not produce a child to outlive them have not survived. Katherine Everett viewed her cousins Olive Ardilaun and Ina Ferrers as lonely women. Ina probably suffered from depression and her childlessness may have been an instigating factor. She was affectionate towards children before her marriage, and afterwards wrote that she tried to be as much a mother as possible to her motherless nephew.⁸⁶³ The greatest barrier to conception among these Munster families was not the women's health or dress, but rather a lack of knowledge and successful treatments on the part of the medical profession regarding fertility issues.

Judith Schneid Lewis has provided the convincing argument that women could gain great satisfaction from the knowledge that they were fulfilling their family duty.⁸⁶⁴ Even women who were not fond of their husbands would have chosen to have children, as the importance of a male heir was so widely acknowledged by men and women, and was eagerly anticipated in marriage settlements. Estates were bequeathed to the, as yet unborn, eldest son of the heir.⁸⁶⁵ The continuity of power implied by the birth of an heir was demonstrated through naming patterns. Women were well aware that they were supplying their marital family with a link, both to the past, and the future, when they gave birth to a son. The custom of placing the child in the context of its family's history, through the use of a family name, who would in turn be replaced by another of the same name, had not died out by 1860, or even

⁸⁶¹ Carbery, *Happy world*, p. 13.

⁸⁶² Sandford (ed.), *West Cork Journal* p. 34.

⁸⁶³ Ina, Lady Ferrers to Arethusa White, May 19, 1905, Bantry Collection, BL/EP/B/2494.

⁸⁶⁴ Schneid Lewis, *Family way*, p. 17.

⁸⁶⁵ J. Gerard, *Country house life*, p. 28.

1900. Perhaps the more peripheral region of Munster was slower to follow the trends of the most fashionable circles described by Schneid Lewis, where by 1860, aristocratic children 'were far more likely to bear a novel name than those of their immediate family members, living or dead,' and 'only one mother born after 1775 used the same name twice' for her children.⁸⁶⁶ Family Christian names were used throughout this sample. In almost every generation of O'Briens, Barons Inchiquin, from the early modern period to 1914, boys were overwhelmingly named Donough, Murrough, William or Lucius.⁸⁶⁷ In the Catholic Ryan family in Inch, three successive owners of the estate were named George Ryan. The pattern was broken in 1900, when the heir, George, predeceased his father, and so the estate passed to the second son Richard. If this had happened a generation earlier, Inch would have stayed in the ownership of a George as the two elder brothers shared the name.⁸⁶⁸ Sharing names between siblings was not uncommon.⁸⁶⁹

Four of the thirteenth Baron Inchiquin's ten daughters were named Augusta Louisa Jane, Nora Louisa Jane, Louisa Blanche and Louisa Anna Maria.⁸⁷⁰ There was greater freedom with girls' Christian names than with boys, however, and some entirely new names were introduced into families. This may be the result of the Gaelic revival, or as Schneid Lewis contests, part of a pattern of increasing appreciation of children as personalities.⁸⁷¹ Gaelic names made a few appearances.⁸⁷² The 16th Baron Inchiquin and his English wife Ethel had six children, the eldest son and heir was christened Donough like many of his forebears, but more fantastical and romantic names were bestowed on his siblings Phaedrig, Fionn, Beryl, Helga

⁸⁶⁶ Schneid Lewis, *Family way*, p. 64-5.

⁸⁶⁷ 'Inchiquin', *Burke's peerage and baronetage*.

⁸⁶⁸ *Burke's Irish families*, p. 1002.

⁸⁶⁹ Schneid Lewis, *Family way*, p. 64-5.

⁸⁷⁰ 'Inchiquin', *Burke's peerage and baronetage*, (1900).

⁸⁷¹ Schneid Lewis, *Family way*, pp. 64-5.

⁸⁷² Three of Dermot and Mabel O'Brien's five children were called Brendan, Máirín, and Brigid, Descriptive list, O'Brien of Cahirmoyle, NLI/MS/36.

and Griselda.⁸⁷³ Mabel O'Brien carefully selected the name of her first child, showing the influence of Celtic Christian mythology, by choosing the name Brendan. However, she rejected St Brendan's mother's name, Cara, for a possible daughter, as she felt it did not go well with O'Brien.⁸⁷⁴

Schneid Lewis has discussed the transition that took place during the century 1760-1860 regarding mothers' involvement in their children's lives. She noted that during this time, daughters became 'more child centred than their mothers had been', when their time came to give birth.⁸⁷⁵ This transition was well and truly complete in 1860s Munster, though evidence suggests that even the previous generation of women were careful and involved mothers. Ellen Spring-Rice, who married in 1839, always disliked leaving her children, 'tho' it must be done.'⁸⁷⁶ These women wanted offspring, not just in order to gain the prestigious position of mother, but to carry out the duties of motherhood, and to know and love their children. While the baptismal name linked children to their future duties as representatives of family and class, nicknames centred them within their birth families as individuals. Throughout the period, there was a universal practice of calling the youngest child 'baby'. This was done until the next child was born, and in some cases until the child was at least four.⁸⁷⁷ Some parents also used pet names for their children, demonstrating a close bond, and a lack of formality, in the relationship.⁸⁷⁸ In her first letter to her then two-year-old son, Ethel, Lady Inchiquin addressed him as 'Sonnie', 'Baba' and 'Sonniekins', while his little sister was referred to as 'Baby'.⁸⁷⁹ The closeness suggested by these nicknames is further demonstrated in the body of the letter in

⁸⁷³ 'Inchiquin', *Burke's peerage and baronetage*.

⁸⁷⁴ Mabel O'Brien to Julia O'Brien, 8 Feb. 1903, NLI/MS/36,795 2.

⁸⁷⁵ Schneid Lewis, *Family way*, p. 70.

⁸⁷⁶ Mary O'Brien to Mary Fitzgerald, Apr. 8, 1861, NLI/MS/36,767.

⁸⁷⁷ The practice can be seen, for example, in the O'Brien of Inchiquin 21 Jan. 1914 NLI/MS/45,504 and Grehan (21 Jan., 14 Apr. 1893) IE/BL/EP/G/838.

⁸⁷⁸ For example Elizabeth White was called 'Lizzie' or 'Lotty' and Gertrude Foster was named 'Bee'.

⁸⁷⁹ Ethel, Lady Inchiquin, to Donough O'Brien, Sept. 5, 1899, NLI/MS/45,505/3.

the way she discussed things which would be of interest to him, such as the 'Puff Puff' which brought 'Mama and Papa' away.⁸⁸⁰ She was also careful to reassure him that they had not abandoned him, despite leaving while he was asleep:

Dada and Mama will come back again very soon to Baba, Mama doesn't like being far away from her little Sonniekins. She loves her little Sonnie and will come back very soon.⁸⁸¹

Ethel still referred to her eldest son as 'Sonnie' when he was seventeen. He was the only one of her children for whom she did not choose a name, as it was predetermined by family precedence. It is significant, then, that it was only her eldest son to whom she gave a nickname. By doing this she could separate her own child from tradition.

The desire for children is apparent in the courtship letters of Mabel Smyly and Dermot O'Brien. They gave the as yet to be conceived infant a pet name, Tommy, and worked out the soonest he could possibly be born. She even planned how the house should be reordered to accommodate a nursery, before she herself had moved in.⁸⁸² Mabel expected a winter baby, and was not disappointed with the birth of Brendan in January, ten months after their marriage. It is significant that Mabel and Dermot O'Brien nicknamed their future child 'Tommy' rather than 'Mary' or 'Ellen'.⁸⁸³ Differing reactions greeted the birth of boys and girls. Amanda Foreman has compellingly conveyed the pressure on aristocratic women to produce an heir during the last years of the eighteenth century.⁸⁸⁴ Judith Schneid Lewis found that the normal practice among the aristocracy was to offer commiserations on the birth of a daughter, and congratulations if a son was produced, and that all women of childbearing age in her study

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸⁸² Mabel O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, 2 Feb. 1902, NLI/MS/36,699/3.

⁸⁸³ Ibid., 26 Feb. 1902.

⁸⁸⁴ A. Foreman, *The duchess*, p. 123-4.

felt pressure to produce a male heir, and relief once they had achieved that goal.⁸⁸⁵ When an old retainer was told of the birth of Violet Martin, the author, in 1862, he replied that he was glad her mother was well, but was 'sorry for the other news'. She was an eleventh daughter.⁸⁸⁶

Unlike Mary O'Brien in the opening quote, who was married in her early twenties, Mabel was apprehensive before marriage as to her ability to produce children, and reminded Dermot that they should still be happy if the union failed to produce an heir.⁸⁸⁷ When she became pregnant almost straight away, she hoped that it would be a boy, and so the line of succession would be secured for her husband's family. Mabel even wrote to her mother-in-law shortly before giving birth with complete conviction that her child would be born a boy.⁸⁸⁸ Sons were universally celebrated. Esther Grehan was filled with pride when she recorded the birth of her second son. It was one of the longest diary entries she ever recorded and she was careful not to reveal the sex of the baby until the very end when she wrote: 'Dr. Leader came back by 2 o'clock train. Met Stephen at Station & congratulated on birth of his son.'⁸⁸⁹ Stephen Grehan did not complain in his diary when his wife produced a daughter, but, he made a terse entry.⁸⁹⁰ When his son George was born, in 1893, after four girls and ten years of married life, the entire community celebrated: 'At dark the men had a big bonfire at Castle (?) quarry & sang & danced & drank nearly all night.'⁸⁹¹ He was happy to record going for a drive with Esther and the 'heir apparent' a few weeks later.⁸⁹² His joy was even more obvious when his son Stevie was born, as little George had died in infancy: 'on my return found that Esther had

⁸⁸⁵ Schneid Lewis, *Family way*, p. 61, See also P. Jalland, *Marriage and politics*, p. 150.

⁸⁸⁶ G. Lewis, *Somerville*, p. 26.

⁸⁸⁷ Mabel O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, Mar. NLI/MS/36,699/3.

⁸⁸⁸ Mabel O'Brien to Julia O'Brien, NLI/MS/36,795/2.

⁸⁸⁹ Esther Grehan, diary entry, 27 Dec. 1895, BL/EP/G/840.

⁸⁹⁰ Stephen Grehan, diary entry, 6 May 1884, IE/BL/EP/G/739; 13 July 1885, IE/BL/EP/G/740; 4 Jan. 1887, BL/EP/G/1887; 14 Apr. 1890, IE/BL/EP/G/744.

⁸⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 27 June 1893, BL/EP/G/747.

⁸⁹² *Ibid.*, 21 July 1893.

presented me with a little Son.' He had traced over and emboldened the words in his diary. Stephen was in a celebratory mood for a number of days. The reaction of his friends also greatly exceeded their response to his girls' arrivals. When he went hunting for the first time, after the birth, he was 'overwhelmed with Congratulations'.⁸⁹³ Two decades earlier, Jane, Countess of Bantry wrote in glowing terms to her husband, when her eldest daughter gave birth to their first grandson: 'Isn't the news of Lizzie too delightful.- How thankful we all are- not only of how her doing well- but a Son. It is delightful Our First Grandson. I am too thankful.

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Both the White and Grehan families had a high proportion of female to male children, and these sons came into the ownership of the estate in adulthood. In other families, where there was no shortage of male heirs there seemed to be less distinction in the reactions to male and female newborns. Mary O'Brien wrote that her Nelly was 'a most satisfactory little girl – to her Mother at least & really seems to have pleased most people who took an interest in my Baby's sex, size, form & colour.'⁸⁹⁵ This was not just the words of a mother carried away with excitement; her grandfather wrote a poem dedicated to the infant Nelly.⁸⁹⁶ Mary was in no real hurry to have a boy, and she preferred the idea of girl children, as she did not like any roughness or heavy activity. Five years earlier, in a letter of congratulation to her cousin on the birth of a new brother, she was shameless in her preference:

You must be glad to have another brother as there are so many of you girls. All the same, tho' we are worse off than you are I had been waiting to have a sister & not a brother – "Generally speaking I don't like boys" said Miss Murdstone [character in *David Copperfield*] to one of that

⁸⁹³ Ibid., 28 Dec. 1895, BL/EP/G/749.

⁸⁹⁴ Countess of Bantry to 3rd Earl of Bantry, n.d. [1876] BL/EP/B/2400 (emphasis original).

⁸⁹⁵ Mary O'Brien to Lucy Gwynn, 12 June 1864, NLI/MS/36,768.

⁸⁹⁶ Poem, 26 Dec. 1864, NLI/MS/36,810/1, see also Mary O'Brien to Lucy Gwynn, 3 Feb. 1865 NLI/MS/36,768.

species: & I so far agree with her that I don't much like them from about 3 years old to 14 or 15.⁸⁹⁷

Mary knew that to have numerous sisters was to be financially 'worse off', but she was not alone in her preference. Her sister Amy was delighted when Mary's third child was also a girl in 1866. She explained why the 'letters received this evening have made us all very happy... After all I am not at all sorry that you have a girl instead of a boy[,] as I am glad Nelly has a sister near her own age.'⁸⁹⁸ Ethel, Lady Inchiquin's maternal grandfather had little patience with such a view, and his reaction is the most negative to survive. When his daughter's first child was a girl, born in 1865, he wrote: 'All here [his unmarried children] seem to me pleased that it is a little Girl, but I do not know why,' and then to discuss with more enthusiasm 'two 3 year old unbroken dark brown colts.'⁸⁹⁹ Any disappointment on the arrival of a girl was generally expressed silently. Lady Carbery viewed her father and grandfather's reaction to her own birth to be completely natural:

Downstairs in the library, Mr. Toulmin and Harry sat together. Neither showed the disappointment he felt when Doctor Drage told them that the boy they wanted had not come. They stood up, and drank to the Little Girl.⁹⁰⁰

Correspondents were more likely to be concerned for the health of the mother than to be overly fussy about the sex of her child. Children were important cogs in the success of the family and the class, but even this was placed second, in the eyes of her husband, to the mother's own health.

⁸⁹⁷ Mary Spring-Rice to Mary Molyneux, 17 Nov. 1859, NLI/MS/36,767.

⁸⁹⁸ Alice Spring-Rice to Mary O'Brien, 6 June 1866, NLI/MS/36,764.

⁸⁹⁹ Robert Stansfeld to Jonas Foster, Oct. 12, 1865, NLI/MS/45,520/7.

⁹⁰⁰ Carbery, *Happy world*, p. 20.

Pregnancy and childbirth

Pregnancy was a time of excitement mingled with fear. Mary O'Brien's letters to Lucy Gwynn, after her marriage, demonstrate her pleasure in awaiting the birth of her first child. Mary was excited at the prospect of motherhood, but nervous at the thought of childbirth itself. She wrote of the 'delight' she experienced in her anticipation:

I can very thoroughly sympathise with your "wish it were well over" –harvest-time [childbirth] is anxious, to say nothing of the alarm which I should think most people must feel at the near approach of certain but unknown suffering.⁹⁰¹

Many women conceived on honeymoon, and so went from being uninformed girls to expectant mothers, without access to their female support network. Physically, Mary O'Brien found the condition of pregnancy trying, and her discomforts led her to 'get fits of utterly unreasonable depression which with [her] rather morbid disposition take the line of being desperately abusive of [herself] as utterly good-for-nothing.'⁹⁰² Such a rollercoaster of emotions was understandable, and was shared by other first-time mothers. Before marriage, Mabel O'Brien wrote of the 'little thread of fear of the unknown' when she thought about the 'shadow children' which she hoped one day to have.⁹⁰³ For some, the negative thoughts outweighed the positive. Towards the end of her second pregnancy in as many years, Lady Elizabeth Leigh wrote to her father:

Of course myself I am in a very poor state, but on fine days I sit out in the garden in easy chairs to get out in the air, of course driving or walking is out of the question. I cannot expect to get

⁹⁰¹ Mary O'Brien to Lucy Gwynn, 7 June 1864, NLI/MS/36,768.

⁹⁰² Ibid.

⁹⁰³ Mabel Smyly to Dermot O'Brien, 24 Jan., 1902, NLI/MS/36,699/2.

less suffering, till the next business is over next month, please God- I certainly between the two, have had a dreary long time of it.⁹⁰⁴

Elizabeth dreaded the pain that was facing her. She was physically weak and may have suffered post-natal depression. Such trepidation was understandable, as there was a high mortality rate among new mothers, which will be discussed below.

For most women pregnancy and the advent of children was a more-or-less positive experience. Numerous pregnancies were taken in their stride. Esther Grehan's diaries gave the state little attention. She made only one reference to a specifically pregnancy related illness when she 'threw up a little bit out walking' and was sick over her clothes.⁹⁰⁵ Otherwise her life continued almost as normal, and she did not hide away from society. She still went to the hunt, though by pony and trap, to watch proceedings from the road.⁹⁰⁶ Three days before her daughter Aileen was born in 1890, Esther drove her pony-trap an hour's distance, by herself, to collect Stephen from the train, and the day before the birth of another daughter, Kathleen, the couple arranged that the harriers would meet at Clonmeen before the hunt.⁹⁰⁷ When her 'waters bubbled away in bed,' and the time came for her to give birth to her sixth child, she persuaded Stephen to go to a meeting in Cork as 'Dr. Sandford was most anxious he should attend'.⁹⁰⁸ Such ability to continue with everyday life while pregnant was not unique. Schneid Lewis found that 'at no time in the century 1760-1860 does there seem to have been any social taboo against appearing visibly pregnant in public, contrary to public myth.'⁹⁰⁹

⁹⁰⁴ Elizabeth Leigh to Earl Bantry, 22 May 1876, BL/EP/B/2448.

⁹⁰⁵ Esther Grehan, diary entry, 30 Oct. 1895, BL/EP/G/840.

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid., 30 Nov. 1895, BL/EP/G/840.

⁹⁰⁷ Ibid., Apr. 11 1890, BL/EP/G/744; 3 Feb. 1887, BL/EP/G/741.

⁹⁰⁸ Ibid., 27 Dec. 1895, BL/EP/G/840.

⁹⁰⁹ Schneid Lewis, *Family way*, p. 124.

Preparations for labour were similar throughout this timeframe. While women were busy performing the duty of providing an heir, their husbands and families rallied round to give them as much support as possible. The focus was on the expectant mothers' physical and mental comfort. Women gave birth at home. A few days before Mabel gave birth in 1903, she reported that the monthly nurse had been installed.⁹¹⁰ Edward O'Brien wrote that he and Mary were more or less stuck in Cahirmoyle, his country estate, 'for the next three weeks or so' as her confinement was coming on.⁹¹¹ Mabel's child was born in her husband's Dublin house, but her mother, who lived nearby, was a welcome support during the day.⁹¹² When Ethel, Lady Inchiquin gave birth to her first child in 1897, she had the added comfort of staying in her family's London home, with the comforting presence of her mother on hand.⁹¹³ Parents, sisters or aunts might visit the expectant mother shortly before or after the birth, and those who could not attend sent letters or telegrams offering congratulations, advice and support.⁹¹⁴

During labour itself, minimal numbers were present in the room. Mabel's mother had sat with her for much of the day, but she gave birth attended only by the monthly nurse and the doctor. Her mother, husband and sister-in-law waited downstairs for news. Mabel's mother was permitted to return a quarter of an hour after the birth, and Mabel's husband Dermot was allowed up a half an hour later. It was quite a relaxed affair, and while Mabel admitted that she had been to

⁹¹⁰ Mabel O'Brien to Julia O'Brien, January 1903, NLI/MS/36,795/2.

⁹¹¹ Edward O'Brien to Charlotte Grace O'Brien, Jan. 10 1865, MS/36,750.

⁹¹² Mabel O'Brien to Julia O'Brien, January 1903, NLI/MS/36,795/2.

⁹¹³ Assorted telegraphs, NLI/MS/45,505/4.

⁹¹⁴ For example of letters see NLI/MS/45,520/7; and telegrams of congratulation, NLI/MS/45,505/4.

tea parties and even to whist-parties that I have enjoyed more than what my nurse calls “the jiminastic” on the 11th, but still it was quite endurable and the time of convalescence and baby worship that comes after has been a time of great luxury and content.’⁹¹⁵

The birth of Esther Grehan’s last child came on quickly, and the child ‘was born at 11.20 A.M. after 20 minutes.’ Her doctor was telegraphed for at ten o’clock but did not arrive until one o’clock when she was ‘comfortably settled up.’ Only her brother Charlie, who had medical training, and the monthly nurse were present during labour. Like Mabel, Esther stressed the positive in her account of labour, even though, in contrast to Mabel, this account was in diary form, and so was written for her own consumption. She was, reportedly, ‘quite at ease’ and was spared her usual complications: ‘The after birth which as a rule Dr. Leader has to take away came away naturally’.⁹¹⁶

Childbirth was, nevertheless, potentially dangerous. Advice manuals recommended that upper-class women take life extremely easy in the weeks after giving birth to allow the womb to contract fully. The belief that women should remain horizontal as long as possible after parturition was a universally held view. Certainly this advice was followed by Lady Elizabeth Leigh. Even her mother dared not go near her for a few days, as talking could excite her. A regime of ‘strictest quiet’ was implemented in the house, with the consent of her mother, husband and doctor. Elizabeth was not even permitted to read a letter from her father in case it fevered her.⁹¹⁷ Elizabeth was already weak before pregnancy so some caution was understandable. In 1865, Ethel, Lady Inchiquin’s maternal grandfather was recommending that

⁹¹⁵ Mabel O’Brien to Julia O’Brien, 24th Jan. 1903, NLI/MS/36,795/2.

⁹¹⁶ Esther Grehan, diary entry, 27 Dec. 1895, BL/EP/G/840.

⁹¹⁷ Jane, Countess Bantry to 3rd Earl Bantry, n.d. ‘Friday’ [1876], BL/EP/B/2400 8, ‘Wednesday’ [1876], BL/EP/B/2400 11.

her mother take things very easy after the birth.⁹¹⁸ At the same time, Mary O'Brien was jokingly complaining about the caution expressed over her recuperation:

I am as well as possible – rather better; & have had permission from my Doctor for the last two days to walk a little. But Mother & Nurse bully me & say “it is better to be on the safe side” so I get from bed to sofa with[ou]t standing on my feet.⁹¹⁹

Other women in the sample developed their own patterns of recovery. Stephen Grehan recorded various stages of his wife's rehabilitation in his diary; such as when Esther moved to the sofa, left her room, stood up for the first time, came down to the drawing room, sat outside, went for a drive, and the final stage in her recovery, in the case of her second child, was the day 'Esther drove herself to Kanturk in pony trap'. This took place just over three weeks after parturition.⁹²⁰ Twenty days after the birth of her sixth child, 'Esther came in to lunch & re-entered polite society.' The following day, Stephen took her for her first drive around the eastern border of their property.⁹²¹ Lady Carbery remembered that her mother followed a set pattern after each of her children. About a month after the child was born, Emma Toulmin went on a riding tour with her husband 'while Nanny and the new Baby...drove' after them.⁹²²

To the modern audience, this long recuperation may seem excessive, especially when compared to the recovery time allowed for women of the working class during the same

⁹¹⁸ Robert Stansfeld to Jonas Foster, Oct. 12, 1865, NLI/MS/45,520/7.

⁹¹⁹ Mary O'Brien to Lucy Gwynn, 12 June 1864, NLI/MS/36,768, see also Countess of Bantry to 3rd Earl Bantry, n.d. 1876, IE/BL/EP/B/2400.

⁹²⁰ Stephen Grehan, diary entry, Aug. 1886, BL/EP/G/741.

⁹²¹ Ibid., 15-16 Jan. 1896, BL/EP/G/750.

⁹²² Everett, *Happy world*, p. 27.

period.⁹²³ However, Pat Jalland's *Women, marriage and politics* has successfully conveyed the danger faced by women during the period 1860-1914, each time they became pregnant. Jalland took up this thread again in *Death in the Victorian Family*. Upper-class women were no more protected from the dangers of childbirth than poorer women, and indeed for a time before sterilisation was fully understood, expensive doctors might do more harm than good with infected instruments and unwashed hands.⁹²⁴ Jalland has humanely described the devastating effects of complicated miscarriages and puerperal fever, which in some cases led to intensely painful deaths, with the medical practitioners powerless to do anything but attempt to ease the suffering with prescriptions of opiates and champagne.⁹²⁵ She discussed examples of women who died in the days after the birth of their first child, from exhaustion or puerperal fever, as well as women whose bodies could not cope with the stress of too many pregnancies.⁹²⁶

Jalland has calculated that in excess of five women died per thousand live births in Britain, and many others died as a result of problematic miscarriages.⁹²⁷ It was therefore likely that most women would know of someone else whose death was linked to childbearing. Two mortalities took place as a result of childbirth among twenty fertile marriages of Munster landlords in this sample during this period. Both of them appear to have suffered from the burden of constant pregnancies. Emily, Lady Inchiquin died eleven days after the birth of her fourth child, at the age of twenty five. She had married at the age of twenty in 1862, and had

⁹²³ In some maternity hospitals, patients were expected to get up and walk four hours after giving birth. K. Codell Carter, 'Introduction', in K. Codell Carter (trans. and ed.), I. Semmelweis, *Childbed fever*, (Madison, 1983).p. 4.

⁹²⁴ Ibid.

⁹²⁵ Pat Jalland, *Birth to Death*, p47.

⁹²⁶ P. Jalland, *Women, from birth to death*, pp. 172, 172-6; P. Jalland, *Death in the Victorian family* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 46-9.

⁹²⁷ Ibid.,

given birth in 1863, 1864, 1866 and 1867.⁹²⁸ Elizabeth Ryan married in 1875. She gave birth in 1876 and 1877, and died just four days after the birth of her second child, who unfortunately did not survive her.⁹²⁹ These women's stories are tragic, even more so because no information on their lives survives, beyond the terse entries in *Burke's Peerage or Landed Gentry*. They may have died from puerperal fever, excessive blood loss, heart-strain, or some other complication relating to the birth. These unfortunate women were extreme cases of the possible suffering incurred through the desire for children.

Many other women experienced a good deal of distress. Julia O'Brien wrote to her husband that his sister Lucy, who had once been so well and strong, was forced to remain lying down and was unable to sit, as a result of an old 'internal laceration', for which nothing could now be done by the medical profession.⁹³⁰ Ethel, Lady Inchiquin, was badly shaken, and had to lie still for a few days in order to avoid a feared miscarriage.⁹³¹ The most well documented case in this sample of damage to a woman's health as a result of childbirth is that of Esther Grehan. Immediately after the birth of her sixth child in 1895, she was happy to find that the placenta came away by itself.⁹³² However, what seemed to be a blessing turned into a nightmare. Grehan suffered constant blood loss for months and baffled her doctor. He eventually decided that it was her normal menstrual period 'only more profuse'.⁹³³ She understandably felt weak and ill, and was admitted to a private clinic in Dublin in April, under the care of a Dr. Mackan. He decided that her womb had not contracted properly after the birth, so he performed an operation and had a nurse administer hot douches. When this did not curb the bleeding he

⁹²⁸ 'Heytesbury' and 'Inchiquin' in *Burke's peerage and baronetage*, 105th ed. [2nd Impression], (London, 1975).

⁹²⁹ 'Ryan of Inch', B. Burke, *Burke's Irish family records*, (London, 1976).

⁹³⁰ Julia O'Brien to Edward O'Brien, NLI/MS/36,772.

⁹³¹ Ethel, Lady Inchiquin to 15th Baron Inchiquin, 6, 9, June n.d. [1907-8], NLI/MS/45,504/2.

⁹³² Esther Grehan, diary entry, Dec. 27, 1895, BL/EP/G/840.

⁹³³ *Ibid.*, diary entry, Apr. 13, 1896. BL/EP/G/841. See also in the same diary: entries Feb. 3, 14, 16 and Apr. 4 for examples of effect of discharge.

decided to insert an 'instrument', which she was to wear constantly for three months.⁹³⁴ The debilitating discharge continued, however, and her health never fully recovered. She became dangerously ill the following year, the treatment for which was to have her head shaved and blistered. Esther passed into a coma and died in 1900, when her youngest child was four years old.⁹³⁵

Fathers wanted an heir to carry on the family name, but there were generally nephews or cousins who would gladly take on the estate, if a marriage was childless. While there might be some disappointment if a son was not produced, men, generally, put the health and well-being of their wives first. The tragic story of May Clifford, the elder sister of Esther Grehan, can serve to highlight the priorities of a husband. May married Charlie Clifford in early 1881 and the pair travelled to Australia. Ten months after the wedding, May gave birth to a healthy son, but she herself died less than a week later.⁹³⁶ On Sunday, the fourth of December, her husband later reported, 'the poor little woman was allowed up for the first time [after the birth of her son] & though very weak, seemed to gather strength and confidence therefrom,' but sadly it was, 'while she was lying on the sofa,' and dictating a letter about her positive progress to her family at home, 'that she first felt the spasms of pleurisy which in thirty-six hours killed her.' The doctors were powerless to help her, and only made her final hours more difficult by applying 'scalding hot poultices in rapid succession to her back & side & you could hear her efforts to breathe all over the house.' The doctors did not properly understand her illness and 'on Tuesday there was a consultation between the two best doctors in Sydney who left [Charlie] with a very hopeful report,' and he 'sat with her then watching every sign for an

⁹³⁴ Ibid., Apr. 2, 20, 25, May 1, 16, 21, 27, 1896.

⁹³⁵ Ibid., Sept. 20-22 and Oct. 20, 1897, BL/EP/G/842; Stephen Grehan to Amy Chichester, May 3, 1900, BL/EP/G/835.

⁹³⁶ Charlie Clifford to Sir Charles Raleigh Chichester, and to Raleigh Chichester (father and brother of the deceased), 10 Dec. 1881, BL/EP/G/1292.

improvement of the spasmodic breathing which they had led one to believe would come.’ It was not to be. Charlie sat with her through the night and ‘At 4.a.m. she began to be a little delirious... at 6 o’clock in the morning of the eve of the Immaculate Conception ...her little head lay back on [his] arm without a struggle.’⁹³⁷ Her husband was heartbroken. In his letter to her father, written three days after May’s death, he wrote that ‘the happy joyous dream of the last ten months of unalloyed happiness was at an end’.⁹³⁸ In his letter to her brother, he wrote:

The last ten months of my life have been spent in unalloyed happiness& pride in one who loved me so[,] who during this short interval had gained the admiration & respect of all who knew her. I am scarcely able yet to realize that she is gone & I feel for you so who really knew what her worth really was & must mourn for her accordingly.⁹³⁹

Early care

Even in her death she had gained his admiration for her bravery and resignation, though he might have exaggerated the ease with which she died, in an attempt to comfort her family. It was only at the end of the second letter, to May’s brother, that he mentioned the health, or even the existence of the child. He was ‘thankful to say that her little boy is very well but that the doctor will not take the responsibility of letting him go for a month.’ Charlie planned on embarking on the month-long voyage home to his in-laws ‘on the 4th of January with him & a wet nurse.’⁹⁴⁰ May was prevented from acting out her role as mother because of failings in medical knowledge at the time. Those women who lived to see their children grow, however, played an important role in their lives.

Lady Carbery began writing *Happy World* when she was twelve, reworking it as an adult, but she was careful to preserve the innocence of the child author. It would not be surprising if she

⁹³⁷ Ibid., 10 Dec. 1881, BL/EP/G/1292.

⁹³⁸ Charlie Clifford to Sir Charles Raleigh Chichester, 10 Dec. 1881, BL/EP/G/1292.

⁹³⁹ Charlie Clifford to Raleigh Chichester, 10 Dec. 1881, BL/EP/G/1292.

⁹⁴⁰ Ibid., 10 Dec. 1881, BL/EP/G/1292.

embellished this innocence (she was the second eldest of twelve children), as she believed that she had come down from heaven, held by angels who had knocked on the window for her to be let in.⁹⁴¹ Although the act of childbirth and breastfeeding were kept hidden from Lady Carbery, she knew that mothers kept their newborn baby in bed with them for a period of 'three or four weeks,' and even after that time, infants could not be separated from their mothers for more than three hours.⁹⁴² Her mother breastfed her children herself. Breastfeeding appears to have been the preferred choice for women in the Munster landed class. Mabel O'Brien fed her son Brendan on demand and joked that he was turning her into a pagan; she had to sit at home 'to await his lordship's pleasure' while her husband went to church. At three months old he was still 'practically a two-hours baby' and Mabel found 'that the time for doing regular everyday things never seems to come.'⁹⁴³ Brendan was not weaned until he was nearly eight months old, and then he was fed 'plain sterilized cow's milk twice in the 24 hours and Millin's food for his four other meals.'⁹⁴⁴

When women did not breastfeed their children, it was often a decision they took reluctantly, or because the child was not thriving. Esther Grehan's children were fed in a variety of ways. Her second daughter, Magda, was fed a succession of various milks, until goat's milk was settled on and the baby thrived. She was happy with the result and noted that Magda was 'twice as lively as May was at her age.'⁹⁴⁵ Her decision to use goat's milk could not be derided by even the most fervent supporter of breastfeeding. She was staying in Davos, undergoing treatment for her lungs. The result of this treatment was that she felt giddy and faint, due to so-called 'weakness of blood' but also largely due to the nature of her treatment,

⁹⁴¹ Carbery, *Happy world*, p. 19.

⁹⁴² Ibid., pp. 25 and 27.

⁹⁴³ Mabel O'Brien to Julia O'Brien, 29 March 1903, NLI/MS/36,795/2.

⁹⁴⁴ Ibid., 21 Aug. 1903, NLI/MS/36,795/2.

⁹⁴⁵ Esther Grehan to Stephen Grehan, 25 Nov. 1885, IE/BL/EP/G/701.

where skin was burned off her chest ‘which is what the doctor wants for probably the next three months he says till that lung gets sound.’⁹⁴⁶ She did not breastfeed again until her last child was born in 1895. There is no record of a wet-nurse being hired, so her children must have been bottle-fed. By the end of the century, sanitation had improved, making bottle-feeding much safer than previously.⁹⁴⁷ Esther’s decision to feed her son Stevie herself was probably influenced by the death of his elder brother George, who died while she was in England, just three months after he was born. Any guilt associated with this, together with the fact that this baby was the longed for heir to the estate, meant that every possible precaution was taken with him. However, she was unable to continue feeding him herself, as her milk dried up and a wet-nurse was found. No mention of this woman’s own infant was made. Hiring the wet-nurse was a success and the baby gained weight each week, and started teething before he was six months old, much to the pride of his mother.⁹⁴⁸

Mary O’Brien was also forced to give up breastfeeding, and had difficulty settling on the diet of her child. She felt that the switch to the bottle was the reason why her child was not as robust as its Gwynn cousin, and knew weaning a child so early was not ideal.⁹⁴⁹ Lady Elizabeth Leigh had no intention of breastfeeding her son, probably because she was perceived as near-death herself.⁹⁵⁰ Successive wet-nurses, sourced by her mother, were tried before one would do.⁹⁵¹ As seen in Jessica Gerard’s sample, it was difficult to find suitable wet-nurses.⁹⁵² When a mother was herself ill, it was deemed foolish to attempt to breastfeed. Early in the

⁹⁴⁶ Ibid., Nov. 25 1885, BL/EP/G/701.

⁹⁴⁷ Gerard, *Country house life*, p. 74.

⁹⁴⁸ Esther Grehan, diary entry 1 July 1896, BL/EP/G/841.

⁹⁴⁹ Mary O’Brien to Lucy Gwynn, 3 Feb. 1865, NLI/MS/36,768.

⁹⁵⁰ Countess Bantry to 3rd Earl Bantry, corr. n.d. 1876, IE/BL/EP/B/2400.

⁹⁵¹ Ibid., Wednesday, n.d. 1876, IE/BL/EP/B/2400.

⁹⁵² Gerard, *Country house life*, p. 39; Jane, Countess Bantry to 3rd Earl Bantry, n.d. ‘Wednesday’ [1876], BL/EP/B/2400/11.

period, a relation of Lady Castletown described as folly the desire of an older mother to breastfeed her child:

Surely it is very bad for your sister Charlotte to go on sucking her child this extra length of time, and can it be good for the Child? Asses milk or cream and water or a fresh breast of a healthy strong young woman would surely be better for the child than her Mother's [?] enfeebled quality of milk⁹⁵³

Katherine Everett had a difficult time getting her eldest son to feed. She was at a disadvantage as she did not have many family supports. Her husband had left her without knowledge of his whereabouts, and the monthly nurse had little hope for the child's survival. She advised Katherine not to make herself 'sick worrying over the child, for anyhow he wouldn't live.' As she found that he slept best in an upright position, 'many nights were spent walking or sitting with the little creature'. Katherine hired a wet nurse, ordered daily batches of asses milk from London, and bought two donkeys in an effort to find a solution to the problem of feeding her child. Eventually, the milk of the quiet old donkey mare suited the child.⁹⁵⁴

During this early stage of their children's lives, a close bond was formed between mother and baby. Katherine Everett expressed her deep love for her eldest son, who 'awoke a protective love...such as tigers and wild beasts might feel for their young'.⁹⁵⁵ Mabel O'Brien was delighted that her son Brendan bounced up and down in his nurse's arms to come to her whenever he saw her.⁹⁵⁶ In the early stages of their children's lives, mothers at the end of the period were only slightly, if at all, more involved in their children's early childcare. Aside from Katherine Everett's experience, motherhood was not a solitary position. Extended family and

⁹⁵³ Harriet St Leger to Caroline St Leger (nee Bishop) n.d. circa 1853-1860s NLI/MS/34,158/1.

⁹⁵⁴ Everett, *Bricks*, pp. 118-119.

⁹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 118, 285.

⁹⁵⁶ Mabel O'Brien to Julia O'Brien, NLI/MS/36,795/2.

servants were used to complement the mother's care, and it was an opportunity for bonding. Mary O'Brien's two older children were sent to the care of her mother and sisters for as long as six months while she was pregnant with her youngest child in 1866.⁹⁵⁷ In a letter to her, her sister Amy described the children's development, and their relationship with their nurse. Her letters demonstrate a close bond between the children and their extended family, and show that children were not kept away in the nursery, but formed an integral part of family life:

I must write & tell you of your darling Nelly – She is seated on Lucy's knee at the [moment], very happy, pulling out the stops & playing! She calls it 'musicky' & cares for nothing else when she can get at music. She is exceedingly fond of it. Mother comes in & kisses her & says she is a darling. I am so delighted at the great pleasure she takes in music.⁹⁵⁸

Mary was separated from her children out of necessity as she was not strong enough to care for them. Amy knew that it was hard for a mother to be separated from her children; 'Oh dear Magsie don't fret about Nelly – I can't bear to think of your being so lonely without her'. Mary lost touch with her children and when she sent over socks she had knitted for Nelly, she underestimated her size, and they fitted perfectly Dermot, who was a year younger.⁹⁵⁹ In the year of her death, Mary and her husband Edward went to Menton, on the French Riviera, with their children. However, she was 'gradually declining' and was no longer able to mother her children, and 'often [went] several days without seeing any of the children except Nelly.'⁹⁶⁰

Edward wrote to his sister Charlotte:

The children miss you much, dear. Mary cannot look after them & they are in want of your kind & judicious management. Nelly remembers you very well & was much disappointed at finding that you would not be at Menton as she had expected.⁹⁶¹

⁹⁵⁷ Alice Spring-Rice to Mary O'Brien, corr. 1866, NLI/MS/36,761.

⁹⁵⁸ Ibid., 30 March 1866, NLI/MS/36,761.

⁹⁵⁹ Ibid.,

⁹⁶⁰ Edward O'Brien to Charlotte Grace O'Brien, 13 Jan. 1868, NLI/MS/750/2.

⁹⁶¹ Ibid., 21 Oct 1867.

These women did not merely produce heirs for the family estate; they were loving towards their children. If a mother could not care properly for her children, other family members stepped in, because it was widely understood that children needed love and affection. Jane, Countess of Bantry acted as surrogate mother to her grandchildren, and took them to her own home, as their mother, Elizabeth, was not equal to the task.⁹⁶² Elizabeth was not in a position, physically or mentally, to care for them, and so she asked her mother to take them. Egerton Leigh later wrote to Jane, Countess Bantry that if his son survived infancy 'it will be entirely owing to you all.'⁹⁶³

The role of mother

The extended task of motherhood has been given sparse attention in histories of this period. Dooley found little evidence of maternal feelings in his study of the landed class, and in his case study of the Leslie family of Glaslough in Co. Monaghan found that successive generations of children were abandoned in school rooms to the care of employees. Anita Leslie, who was born in 1914, wrote: 'In my parents' view schools performed the same function that kennels did for dogs.'⁹⁶⁴ However motherhood, or indeed parenting, was not one of his primary areas of research. A more detailed approach to the subject can be seen in Gerard's *Country House Life*. Gerard has convincingly argued that despite the 'bad press' given to nineteenth century landed parents, by both their contemporaries and by modern historians, neglectful and uninterested parents were the exception and not the rule. She found that 'most memoirs, diaries and letters portray a strikingly different picture: of loving, conscientious and involved parents.'⁹⁶⁵ This 'bad press' has become the accepted view of Victorian mothers; even

⁹⁶² Jane, Countess Bantry to 3rd Earl Bantry, 23 Aug. 1876, BL/EP/B/2399.

⁹⁶³ Egerton Leigh to Jane, Countess Bantry, 16 Jan. 1877, BL/EP/B/2467.

⁹⁶⁴ A. Leslie, *The gilt and the gingerbread*, (London, 1931) p. 68, quoted in Dooley, *Decline of the Big House*, p. 297.

⁹⁶⁵ Gerard, *Country house life*, pp. 65-66.

Mabel Smyly, herself a very involved mother, who had no direct experience of a distant mother in her own family, believed that mothers in the generation previous to her own were accustomed to abandon their children to questionable care of hired help.⁹⁶⁶ M. Jeanne Peterson has criticised the bipolar definition of Victorian motherhood which she has perceived. They have been characterised as either cold and distant mothers, or ‘angels of the house’ who always put the needs of husbands and children first. Neither of these images adequately represents the complexity of life for Victorian women. The mothers in this sample did not just see the children for the famous ‘children’s hour’ of the Victorian period; in fact there was no mention of such a children’s hour in any letters or diaries. Mothers saw their children at various times of the day. They played with them when they were toddlers, and brought them walking, riding or for a drive as they got older.

Parents’ time with their children was reasonably relaxed and informal. Esther Grehan allowed her eldest daughter, May, to pretend Esther was her dolly and to dress her up.⁹⁶⁷ Ethel, Lady Inchiquin took her children to the family’s summerhouse. The pleasure that she took in spending time with her children is obvious from her letters home to her husband, who did not like the sea and preferred to remain at home in Dromoland. Ethel wrote that if only he could love the sea too, they would enlarge the house and spend more time there. While at the summer house, Ethel spent almost all of her time with her children, and their close relationship is obvious in the way she wrote about them, and included them in her letters. She described trips to the seaside, drives to Loop Head, blackberrying in the hedgerows, or painting when the weather was wet. Ethel made sure that their father remembered their birthdays, and allowed

⁹⁶⁶ Mabel O’Brien, speech on behalf of PNEU, n.d., NLI/MS/36,827.

⁹⁶⁷ Esther Grehan to Stephen Grehan, [1885] BL/EP/G/700.

them to draw on the end of her letters if they were too young to write themselves.⁹⁶⁸ The end of letters might include a drawing or kiss from 'Baby' to 'Daddie'.⁹⁶⁹ Each child was treated as an individual and Ethel kept mementos of their possessions, art and early writing, just as her own mother had done during Ethel's first years (Fig. 38).⁹⁷⁰

However, time together was very much on the mother's terms. Ethel looked forward to when her children would go back to school, as she expected she and her husband would 'have more time now at home, it is difficult somehow in the holidays when the children are always about'.⁹⁷¹ When Esther Grehan's daughter had suspected mumps, she went to visit some friends for a few days anyway, and had the doctor telegraph updates of the child's progress. Throughout their married life, Esther and her husband went on excursions to Kerry or England, sometimes for weeks together, leaving the children in the care of their staff. Diary entries indicate that actively supervising her children was not something she saw as a daily duty, and she recorded minding the children when her governess has a visitor or had to attend the dentist.⁹⁷² For Mary O'Brien, being left in sole care of her daughter seemed to be almost a treat.

I have had Baby for a long time, during Bell's [the nurse] going to church & dinner. She is such a good child for one to have the care of - & will make herself happy for an almost indefinite time on the floor, requiring no attention, especially if one goes & practices on the P[iano] F[orte] when she shouts & squeals in accompaniment & is quite delighted.⁹⁷³

⁹⁶⁸ Ethel, Lady Inchiquin to 15th Baron Inchiquin, corr. 1914, NLI/MS/45/504/8.

⁹⁶⁹ Ibid. 21 Sept., Ibid., n.d. [Summer 1907], NLI/MS/45,504/2.

⁹⁷⁰ Children's shoes and bonnets NLI/MS/45,743, letters, NLI/MS/45,503/5, Foster childhood books, NLI/MS/45,524/4.

⁹⁷¹ Ethel, Lady Inchiquin to 15th Baron Inchiquin, [1907/8] NLI/MS/45,504/2.

⁹⁷² Esther Grehan diary entry, 21 Jan. 1893, IE/BL/EP/G/830.

⁹⁷³ Mary O'Brien to Lucy Gwynn, 3 Feb. 1864, NLI/MS/36,768.

Being a good mother was more managing servants than changing nappies. While Ethel, Lady Inchiquin had thought of great ways to entertain her children during the summer, she brought the nurse along to care for 'Baby'.⁹⁷⁴

The women of the class had their own duties and interests to attend to and they did not suspend them in their children's early years. The presence of nurses, nannies and governesses allowed women this freedom. Mothers did not attend to the grubbier aspects of childcare. When Stephen Grehan was a baby, his mother wrote an outraged letter to his father about the neglect their child was suffering at the hands of servants, but Mary showed no inclination to wash and clean the infant herself:

[A]t quarter to two o'clock today, the nurse came down, and said that the child had not as yet been washed or dressed and that the nurse tender, would not do it herself, or allow her to do so....the poor little darling, to be treated so, it was too bad.

The nurse tender, or monthly nurse was paid to leave.⁹⁷⁵

It is understandable then that children grew attached to their nursery attendants, as they were the more omnipresent figures in their lives, and some women went into the profession because they had an obvious talent for working with children. Lady Carbery remembered her childhood nurse as a constant steady presence.

Nanny is strict and patient and kind, and has a way of making children be good when they want to be naughty...There is always laughter in the nursery as sweet as chimes...Every year or two she has a short holiday, but at other times she never leaves us by day or by night...At night when we are in our cots in the darkened night nursery, we hear Nanny's thimble clicking as she sews.⁹⁷⁶

⁹⁷⁴ Ethel, Lady Inchiquin to 15th Baron Inchiquin, corr. Summer [1907], e.g. 13 Aug., NLI/45/504/2.

⁹⁷⁵ Mary Grehan to George Grehan, 1858, BL/EP/G/594.

⁹⁷⁶ Carbery, *Happy world*, pp. 39-40

The toddler siblings Nelly and Dermod O'Brien squabbled jealously when they saw the other in their nurse's arms.⁹⁷⁷ Katherine Everett loved her German nurse Maria and felt her world was falling apart when she was dismissed. They had a physically close relationship and would sleep together, with the nurse singing or telling stories for the child. It is doubtful whether Katherine ever received hugs or physical contact from her cold and distant mother. Ethel, Lady Inchiquin noticed that after a trip to London, 'Baby' was a bit shy with her at first, because they had not seen each other for some time.⁹⁷⁸

The extent to which children's desire for attention was deemed secondary to parents' plans was demonstrated when Esther Grehan and her husband went to England leaving a three-month-old baby, as well as four other children at home in the care of servants.⁹⁷⁹ This did not necessarily mean that they did not love their children; they did, but care was taken by mothers to find the best possible nursery servants to tend to the physical care needs of their children. They felt safe in the knowledge that their children had a similar lifestyle, whether they were at home or away. Ethel, Lady Inchiquin had her children's nurse write to her about their doings and their hours spent outside while she was away with her husband. Nurses were selected for their kindness. Mabel O'Brien, who thought of herself as an especially child-centred mother, would not consider life without nursery servants, and hired a nurse who she believed to be 'absolutely reliable...knowledgeable about infants. She is tall and good looking, very neat, and has a pleasant voice which is...much to be desired in the nursery.' A month later she wrote: 'It is a great matter that we have such a nice nurse for him. She is very kind and careful and inclined to be quite as silly about him as I am.'⁹⁸⁰ Mary O'Brien thought it was

⁹⁷⁷ Alice Spring-Rice to Mary O'Brien, Apr. 1866, NLI/MS/36,761.

⁹⁷⁸ Ethel, Lady Inchiquin to 15th Baron Inchiquin, Wed. n.d. [1907], N;I/MS/45,504/2.

⁹⁷⁹ Esther Grehan, diary entry, 30 Sept. 1893, IE/BL/EP/G/838.

⁹⁸⁰ Mabel O'Brien to Julia O'Brien, 8 Feb., 12 Apr. 1903, NLI/MS/36,795/2.

abnormal for a child to be always in the company of her parents, and it could even damage the child's character.

Mrs Brookfield & child, the wife of the clergyman I told you about, ...the child named Magdelene, very pretty, about 9 or 10 years old, From seeing a great many people – going almost everywhere with her mother, & being generally a good deal noticed, especially by her father, who talks nonsense enough to her, completely to muddle any child who hadn't been brought up to it, Miss Magdelene has acquired what a lady friend of mine would call 'a tidy amount of cheek' not in an altogether disagreeable sense – not at all pert, or forward – rather quiet when not brought out – but considerable self possession – nothing disconcerts her. She is a good little girl but doesn't attract me much.⁹⁸¹

Hired staff, then, should be seen as aids to mothers rather than as substitutes. Only in a minority of houses did staff replace mothers in providing love and affection for children. So many hours were spent by children in the company of mothers, nurses and governesses that they were able to successfully bond with each. Through the selection of nursery staff and teachers, mothers could play a major role in shaping their children's future characteristics.

Education

Children's early education was their mother's responsibility. In the earlier part of this period, all girls were educated at home in the nursery or schoolroom. The resulting education could be haphazard and unmethodical. There were no grades, or exams, to proceed to the next stage, but all subjects were tackled together, and there was not always a set schedule. This issue can be clearly seen in Bantry. Emmeline Esdaile, the beloved governess, wrote to her absent employers of her and her charges' progress.⁹⁸² Governesses were not just with the children when actively teaching, but as the most high status member of staff, they appear to have acted as surrogate parents when required. Esdaile taught the children their lessons, ordered their meals, cared for them in their illness, entertained guests, and sadly oversaw the

⁹⁸¹ Mary O'Brien to Mary Molyneux, 5 Oct. 1859, MS/36,767.

⁹⁸² Emmeline Esdaile to Earl and Countess Bantry corr. 1860-1, BL/EP/B/2401/2403.

funeral of one of the children.⁹⁸³ Unsurprisingly, their lessons were prone to interruption.

Esdaile made no apology for stopping lessons when visitors arrived, so it was clearly expected that education should fit around the family's social life.⁹⁸⁴ It also fitted around travel, and when Lady Elizabeth Leigh travelled to Carlsbad, in modern day Czech Republic, her education was limited to the architectural instruction given by her father, when they visited churches, and the teachings of a hired German tutor. When he was unhappy with her progress, Elizabeth's mother, Jane, examined her while she repeated lessons.⁹⁸⁵

Just because an education was not standardised, did not necessarily mean it was bad. Some women instilled a great love of learning in their children. Sons left for school at an early age, but girls' education continued to be shaped by their mothers' theories. As women had such control over their children's, especially their daughters', education, it followed that mothers and daughters would share similar knowledge and belief systems. Ethel, Lady Inchiquin's mother, Hannah Foster, studied Greek and Egyptian as a teenager, and after her widowhood, brought her daughters to Egypt to educate them in its history. The journal kept by Ethel conveys her knowledge of, and interest in Egyptian antiquity. In Ethel's later years, she hoped to give her daughters the same gift when she brought them to Egypt in the 1930s.⁹⁸⁶

A close contemporary of Hannah Foster, Mary O'Brien, died before her children could begin their schooling properly, but before her death, she devised a system of education which was used by her widower and later by her replacement, the children's step-mother, Julia. Julia O'Brien found the system difficult to teach, as one jumped from one subject to the next, but saw the merit of the method as the children never got bored. When she had children of her

⁹⁸³ Ibid.

⁹⁸⁴ Ibid., 29 Aug. 1861, IE/BL/EP/B/2403.

⁹⁸⁵ Elizabeth White Journal, 1860, 27-30 Aug. 1860, IE/BL/EP/B/2457.

⁹⁸⁶ Notebooks and journals, Hannah Foster and of Ethel, Lady Inchiquin, 45/60-1, 14/742.

own, she took great pains with their education, and discussed it in depth with her husband. She organised a varied curriculum for them while they were on the continent, and increased or decreased time given to various subjects as she felt necessary. Aubrey, who was having lung trouble, 'has been working on long pieces of German grammar & writing quite advanced exercises & now says he is ready to read Crooks...he has really made great progress.' Meanwhile, 'K[itty] has made great progress in her P[iano] F[orte] reading & she & I are both quite pleased, her French reading is improved too, & struck me as better than Margaret's yesterday.' She was constantly changing elements of their education and wanted mathematical training for Kitty but cancelled Margaret's Italian lessons, and had them speak French for the benefit of their accents.⁹⁸⁷ When a mother was herself well educated and interested in the development of the child, the non-standardised education could mean that her children received a well rounded and varied schooling.

Mabel O'Brien was keen for her own children to emulate their father's family and while still breastfeeding her eldest child, she was developing plans for his future education.⁹⁸⁸ The only definitive one she seemed to come to was that she would teach him French, as it was the only way she could see to rid him of 'the first acquired brogue'.⁹⁸⁹ She did not just develop her own ideas on education but studied the writings of psychologists and became a member of the Parents' National Education Union, which had been founded by Charlotte Mason on the principle of 'liberal education for all'.⁹⁹⁰ She was a loyal follower of Mason's theories on teaching and firmly believed that a child should be allowed to take responsibility for their own learning. Mabel must have felt that she was a successful mother and educator, as she lectured

⁹⁸⁷ Julia O'Brien to Edward O'Brien, 28 Nov. 29 Dec. 1900, 17 Jan. 1902, NLI/MS/772.

⁹⁸⁸ Mabel O'Brien to Julia O'Brien, 8 Feb. 1903, NLI/MS/36,795/2.

⁹⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁹⁰ Barbara Caine, 'Mason, Charlotte Maria Shaw (1842–1923)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2008 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.library.ucc.ie/view/article/37743>, accessed 2 Sept 2013].

and wrote about her experience as a mother after her own children were grown up. In one undated speech given as a Union representative she reminisced on the greater part of her married life 'spent in the wilds of West Limerick', where she 'had to control what may be described as a tribal household, a sort of amalgamation of families, with an inadequate staff and an overflowing nursery.'⁹⁹¹

The purpose of education for upper-class girls was to train them to be like their mothers. Daughters observed their mothers' behaviour in social situations. Mothers brought their children to tea in each other's houses, or for drives to the local town. Specially organised children's teas and dances allowed them to practise the niceties of polite conversation before they grew up.⁹⁹² The girlhood of these women was an apprenticeship where the master craftsman was their mother. Specialists were brought in to teach languages or dancing, but the most important teachers on social propriety were the girls' elders. Mabel O'Brien gave the children in her house various responsibilities. For example, the eldest son was given responsibility for the successful running of the water supply. One pair of girls was given the key of the store, while another had free rein over the kitchen garden. In this way, Mabel believed, each one grew up with a sense of responsibility, pride and duty.⁹⁹³ Seemingly the only valuable input made by Catherine Herbert into her children's lives was that she instructed them on how to write requesting references for servants, she also and trained them 'to read a leading article of *The Times* at speed and then to write out a *précis*'.⁹⁹⁴

By the end of the nineteenth century a change took place whereby some girls were sent to boarding schools in England. As a result, mothers had less of a hands-on approach to

⁹⁹¹ Mabel O'Brien, speech on behalf of PNEU, NLI/MS/36,827.

⁹⁹² Esther Grehan, diary entries, 29 Mar., 20, 28 Jun, IE/BL/EP/G/839, 13 Jan. 1897, IE/BL/EP/G/1897.

⁹⁹³ Mabel O'Brien, speech on behalf of PNEU, NLI/MS/36,827.

⁹⁹⁴ Everett, *Bricks and flowers*, p. 20.

educating their daughters. Nonetheless, they took care in selecting schools, ensuring that their daughters were educated in similar values to those which they held themselves. Esther Grehan sent her daughters to Roehampton Convent in London, which she had attended for a short time during the 1870s. There, Esther studied composition, grammar, French, work [sewing], orthography, history, instruction and arithmetic.⁹⁹⁵ The convent took religion seriously, and she was taught numerous prayers as well as Catholic doctrine.⁹⁹⁶ She was careful to give her daughters the same sense of faith, and brought them to mass regularly and prepared them for first communion. When the time came for her eldest daughter May to make her first communion, Esther sent her to a convent in England for a retreat, to prepare her soul for the event.⁹⁹⁷ Hannah Foster, a deeply religious woman, had a similar influence, in the area of religion, on her daughters. She had made notes on religious subjects during her teens and she trained her daughters to hold the same sense of faith. She succeeded to the point of obsession with her sickly eldest daughter Katherine Laetitia Foster, who died while still a teenager. Katherine's journal, which she kept in the lead-up to death, demonstrates the important place held by religion in her life.⁹⁹⁸

Boarding schools appear to have been a positive experience for these girls. Esther Grehan and her daughters attended with sisters and cousins, so had close relations with classmates. Molly Ryan attended the Catholic New Hall School in Chelmsford, Essex, for six years (1889-1895).⁹⁹⁹ Molly never married, but appears to have kept in close contact with the friends she made at school. She listed fellow eighty-three fellow students, or 'fishes', from 1889 to 1893/5 in a notebook, and later she recorded the marriages of nineteen of her fellow

⁹⁹⁵ Esther Grehan, school notebook, 1872-5, IE/BL/EP/G/845.

⁹⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁹⁷ Esther Grehan diary entry 13 June 1895, IE/BL/EP/G/840.

⁹⁹⁸ Katherine Laetitia Foster, journal, 1880-3, and notebook 1881, NLI/MS/14,750 and 879.

⁹⁹⁹ Molly Ryan, journal, IE/BL/EP/R/627 <http://www.newhallschool.co.uk/History> accessed on 18 Sept. 2013.

students, as they happened, as well as the religious careers of those who became nuns. She knew the married names of fourteen, and the religious name of seven of the thirteen who took religious vows. As late as the 1930s she was still adding information on people whom she may not have seen for thirty years.¹⁰⁰⁰

This notebook does not suggest that there was an overly academic emphasis at the school. Drama, music and French were obviously encouraged. Molly Ryan helped organise, and took part in an annual three-day festival called 'Kingstide'. In 1893, she played 'Whims' by Schumann, and an undated photo survives of her and other girls in fancy dress. It is surprising that amongst such plays as *Macbeth* and *The Martyr of Antioch*, there were also comedies and burlesques produced in this convent school. A printed programme survives for the year 1900, complete with a list of players in each play and the programme is copied into her notebook for other years.¹⁰⁰¹ Molly's education did not differ greatly from those girls who were educated at home. The only difference brought about by sending girls to boarding school was that it greatly widened their social network. Unlike Mary Spring-Rice, who only seemed to correspond with family members, Molly Ryan gained an opportunity to mingle with a select, but much wider pool.

Other parents

Men in this Munster sample were often involved and loving fathers. Parents acted in partnership, discussing the best course for their children's futures. Edward O'Brien did not warm to his children immediately. While expecting their first child in 1864, Mary O'Brien wrote:

¹⁰⁰⁰ The fact that Dolly O' Connell was made Reverend Mother in 1936, was added in. IE/BL/EP/R/627.

¹⁰⁰¹ Ibid.

his usual expression when babies are mentioned is 'horrid little beasts'! or at best 'queer little animals!...but I know that he will care far more than he now realizes even before he has the interest of seeing that child has 'some sense' of w[hi]ch I believe he dates the commencement of about 3 years!¹⁰⁰²

His views on small children had not changed by the time his third child was nearly two: 'As for baby', he recorded, 'she is just as strange and cantankerous as ever & is more like a strange wild beast than a human.'¹⁰⁰³ Over twenty years later, Stephen Grehan referred to his offspring as 'brats.'¹⁰⁰⁴ Nonetheless, late Victorian and Edwardian fathers were not all austere disciplinarians. Some were benign but ineffectual characters in their children's lives, like those of Katherine Everett and Lady Carbery, who remembered her father a kind man who loved children 'but didn't understand them,' so he left their upbringing to 'Mama'.¹⁰⁰⁵ Other's took a more active interest. Stephen Grehan was affectionate despite name-calling his children, he taught his daughters how to ride donkeys and ponies, and brought them to dances as they got older.¹⁰⁰⁶ He enjoyed horse riding better than the dances, but 'did [his] duty like a man', as the children 'enjoyed it muchly [sic]'.¹⁰⁰⁷

Edward O'Brien may have forcibly expressed his lack of interest in young children before the birth of his eldest child in 1864, but he was willing to help in any way possible. Mary described him as an 'excellent nurse-maid' as he heated the milk for the baby's bottle.¹⁰⁰⁸ By the time his eldest son became a father in 1903, attitudes had changed utterly. Despite 'trying to put on a show of indifference', each morning Dermot lay in bed with his baby son Brendan 'sitting on his chest and they discourse the iniquities of women and the drawbacks of having

¹⁰⁰² Mary O'Brien to Lucy Gwynn, 12 June 1864, NLI/MS/36,768.

¹⁰⁰³ Edward O'Brien to Charlotte Grace O'Brien, 13 Jan 1868, NLI/MS/36,750/2.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Stephen Grehan, diary entry, 7, 8, Oct. 1892, IE/BL/EP/G/746.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Carbery, *Happy world*, p. 38.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Stephen Grehan, diary entry, 13 Jan. 1899, BL/EP/G/753.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Ibid, 13 Jan. 1899, BL/EP/G/753.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Mary O'Brien to Ellen Spring-Rice, 17 Mar. 1865, NLI/MS/36,758/2.

anything to do with them,' while the child's nurse had her breakfast.¹⁰⁰⁹ He even bathed the infant while dressed up in his Sunday collar.¹⁰¹⁰ Dermod's younger brother did not hide his interest in children and was described as 'a splendid nursery-maid ...for his way of handling the baby.'¹⁰¹¹

The ideal situation for any child was that they would have the benefit of both parents. When a husband predeceased his wife, it was deemed necessary that another male relative would step into the breach. Lady Carbery's family expressed concern that her two sons were growing unmanageable, and needed the discipline and guidance of a father figure. For this reason, many advised her to marry again.¹⁰¹² A sizeable minority of women did not survive long enough to see their children grow up. The care of such children was then left in the hands of a female network of grandmothers, aunts, and step-mothers. Before her death, Mary O'Brien asked that her bedroom at Cahirmoyle be given to her sister-in-law Charlotte, and that her eldest daughter, Nelly should be allowed to sleep there too.¹⁰¹³ When Edward remarried in 1880, twelve years after Mary's death, his second wife was committed to her duties to her step-children. Within three weeks of marrying Edward, Julia wrote that his teenage children 'treat me quite as if I had always belonged to them.'¹⁰¹⁴ Unlike her predecessor, Julia did not get a honeymoon of several months duration in Europe; instead they returned home for Dermod's school holidays.¹⁰¹⁵ Mary's children had a close relationship with Julia, calling her either 'Aunt Julia' or mother.¹⁰¹⁶ Julia sacrificed herself for Mary's children, especially the heir, as much, if not more than for her own children. When Dermod was courting Mabel, Julia acted

¹⁰⁰⁹ Mabel O'Brien to Julia O'Brien, 2 Sept. 1903, NLI/MS/36,795/2.

¹⁰¹⁰ Ibid., 21 Aug. 1903.

¹⁰¹¹ Ibid., 10 May 1903.

¹⁰¹² Sandford (ed.), *West Cork Journal*, p. 128.

¹⁰¹³ Edward O'Brien to Charlotte Grace O'Brien, 11 May 1868, NLI/MS/36,750/2.

¹⁰¹⁴ Julia O'Brien to Lucy Gwynn, 25 Feb. 1880, NLI/MS/36,798/4.

¹⁰¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰¹⁶ Nelly O'Brien to Dermod O'Brien, 1 May, 1888, 23 Jan. 4 Sept., 7 Nov. 1889, NLI/MS/36,779/1.

just as a biological mother should, and allowed him to take her own piano to his Dublin house.

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Death of children

Watching their children grow up and start families of their own was a great joy for these parents. However, some did not get that pleasure with all of their offspring. Childhood illness was a reality, even in the homes of wealthy families. The percentage of children who died in their first year was high. The death rate in England and Wales stood at 148 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1860, 153 deaths per thousand in 1880 and 100 per thousand in 1916. Alarming, one quarter of all deaths per year, during this period, were those of infants dying before their first birthday.¹⁰¹⁸ Between 1851 and 1861, 2.069 per cent of peers' children died before they reached their fifth birthday.¹⁰¹⁹ This compared favourably to the chances of children in the industrial cities, but is still very high by today's standards. In these families, fourteen per cent of children failed to reach adulthood and the majority of these died when they were still quite young. Parents were understandably worried when a child fell ill. Mary O'Brien had difficulties in settling on a suitable diet for her newly weaned daughter, while her sister-in-law's son was cutting a tooth at the same time. She could easily sympathise as 'I know how something amiss with one's small creature weighs on one - & that one is quite sufficiently unhappy with[ou]t being at all alarmed.'¹⁰²⁰ However, when a child became more seriously ill, greater precautions had to be taken.

Parents were willing to traverse the European continent to health spas in order to find a cure for their ailing children. The Bantrys brought their eldest daughter, Elizabeth, to

¹⁰¹⁷ Dermod O'Brien to Mabel Smyly, 7 Oct. 1901, NLI/MS/36,694/1.

¹⁰¹⁸ A.S. Wohl, *Endangered lives: public health in Victorian Britain*, (1983), 10-11, quoted in Jalland, *Death in the Victorian family*, p. 120.

¹⁰¹⁹ W. Farr, *Vital statistics*, (Metuchen, NJ, 1975; reprint of 1885 edn.) p. 190, in Jalland, *Death in the Victorian family*, p. 120.

¹⁰²⁰ Mary O'Brien to Lucy Gwynn, 3 Feb. 1864, NLI/MS/36,768.

Carlsbad, and the O'Briens of Cahirmoyle stayed in Switzerland in an attempt to save their son Aubrey, who had diphtheria, a serious illness which claimed the lives of other children in their circle.¹⁰²¹ Nelly O'Brien was worried that her step-mother, Julia, would 'get knocked-up' because she was staying up all night to nurse Aubrey, who was a cantankerous patient.¹⁰²² Aubrey's female relations gave him all the care they could because they deemed the professional nurses inadequate, and Aubrey's father 'absolutely' refused to assist, as he was sure he would do it wrong, much to the frustration of Nelly.¹⁰²³

Pat Jalland has discussed the heartbreak of a child's death in *Death in the Victorian Family*. Using case-studies of wealthy families, Jalland successfully conveyed the terrible grief felt by parents who lost children. The families she analysed suffered the death of children greatly, but used faith as far as possible to aid them in coping with the loss.¹⁰²⁴ The death of a child was a traumatic blow for any family. Esther Grehan's son George died when he was three and a half months old. Stephen and Esther were away visiting family and friends in London. Before they left, 'Dr Leader came ... – Satisfied with the way baby was going on.'¹⁰²⁵ Eleven days later Esther's diary entry read:

Stephen went to St Pancreas station to meet Jim. I went to call on the Aunts. At 12a.m. Aunt Constance received a note from Miss Towers saying she had received a telegram from Curran saying my baby ~~had died~~ found dead in morning.... Stephen did not get back till too late to catch the Irish mail. We went to Euston Hotel started by morning mail and arrived home at 1p.m.¹⁰²⁶

¹⁰²¹ Elizabeth Journal, 1860, Emmeline Esdaile to Earl and Countess Bantry, corr. Ellen Lucy O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, 23 Aug. 1900, NLI/MS/779/2.

¹⁰²² Ellen Lucy O'Brien to Dermot O'Brien, 20 Sept. 1900, NLI/MS/36,779/2.

¹⁰²³ Ibid.

¹⁰²⁴ Jalland (Oxford, 1996). See case studies of the Horley and Tait families who each lost five children to scarlet fever, pp. 124-142.

¹⁰²⁵ Esther Grehan, diary entry, 30 Sep. 1893, IE/BL/EP/B/838.

¹⁰²⁶ Ibid., 11 Oct.

The body was examined by two doctors 'owing to the sudden & unexplained death'¹⁰²⁷ and the burial took place on the fourteenth of October, the coffin being placed in the vault with the baby's grandmother. Beyond this Esther's diary betrays little grief.¹⁰²⁸ However, her letter to her sister Amy, written on the thirteenth of October, shows the depth of her pain, but also her efforts to trust in God. When she and Stephen had arrived home they saw 'the baby boy already laid out in his little coffin.... Darling little lad, he has the better part, + my only consolation is that I have helped to provide another angel for heaven- Pray that his Father and Mother may be helped to bear the trial. Stephen is frightfully cut up, but resigned to the Will of God.'¹⁰²⁹ Friends and family rallied to support Esther and Stephen in their grief. Some came to be with them, while a neighbour offered to take the girls away for a couple of days so they would miss the funeral.¹⁰³⁰ The real effect of this event on the couple was not made obvious until 1896, with the birth of her second son. Esther's fear that anything should happen to this infant was played out in her constant recording of his weight, even subtracting the child's weight from that of the blanket he was wrapped in. When she went to Dublin for medical treatment, she had his weight sent to her, so she recorded it in her diary.¹⁰³¹

Jalland found that the death of an adult child was deemed to be much harder to bear than that of an infant. Elizabeth Leigh's death was particularly hard to bear for her parents, the Earl and Countess of Bantry, as she was a favourite daughter. They had already missed the funeral of one child, Emily, who died when she was twelve, as they were with Elizabeth in Carlsbad, trying to find a cure for her weak health.¹⁰³² The correspondence which Jane,

¹⁰²⁷ Ibid., 13 Oct.

¹⁰²⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰²⁹ Esther Grehan to Amy Chichester, 13 Oct. 1893, IE/BL/EP/G/828.

¹⁰³⁰ Esther Grehan, diary entry, 12 Oct. 1893, BL/EP/G/838.

¹⁰³¹ Esther Grehan, diary entries 4,11,18,25 Jan., 1,8, 15, 22, 29 Feb., 7,14,21,28, Mar., 4,11,18 Apr. 1896, IE/BL/EP/G/841.

¹⁰³² Telegrams Lord Bantry to Lord Frederick Kerr, 9-11 Sept. 1860, IE/BL/EP/B/2367.

Countess Bantry chose to keep after the death of Elizabeth demonstrates how highly she valued any last memory of her eldest daughter, and how much her circle of friends knew she was suffering at the time of her daughter's death.¹⁰³³ Jane requested every detail possible from those who were with her daughter, and sent flowers to adorn the corpse.¹⁰³⁴ Sympathisers tried to reassure Jane that Elizabeth would have felt no pain and many urged her to use her faith to help her cope.¹⁰³⁵ Elizabeth Gore, Jane's aunt and Elizabeth's godmother tried to reassure her niece that a sudden death was a mercy:

Terrible as sudden death is to the survivors- how much it spares those gone before! Bodily suffering, pangs of separation- anxiety about those left behind & all these are mercifully prevented! Oh! My dearest may the highest Comforter himself be with you, for what can poor human we [?] say or do in such affliction!¹⁰³⁶

Yet at the very end Elizabeth Gore could not help raising, what was, to her, the all-important question. Her godchild had died as a result of an overdose, and Elizabeth Gore hoped that 'perhaps you will be able to tell me about my dear Lizzie's state of mind, the all importance of religion is indeed brought nearer us in all its reality, when one's dearest are taken and the only question is- Were they in Christ?'¹⁰³⁷ When Elizabeth's younger sister had died at the age of twelve, there was a similar emphasis on the state of her soul.¹⁰³⁸ In her will, written in 1897, the year before she died, Jane demonstrated what was most important in her life, by opening with the line:

My beloved children –May God make good my blessings upon you – I am deeply thankful to God for all His Great mercies to me – the love and tenderness of my Beloved Husband and Children being the greatest and most valued of these blessings and mercies.

¹⁰³³ Letters to Countess Bantry, Oct. and Nov. 1880, IE/BL/EP/B/2409-2427.

¹⁰³⁴ Maude Leigh to Countess Bantry, 2-5 Oct 1880, IE/BL/EP/B/2410 and n.d. [Oct] 1880, IE/BL/EP/B/2424.

¹⁰³⁵ Ibid. 3 Oct. 1880; Grace St Albans 11 Oct. 2412, IE/BL/EP/B/2412.

¹⁰³⁶ Elizabeth E. Gore to Jane, Countess Bantry, Monday, n.d. [Oct. 1880] IE/BL/EP/G/2412.

¹⁰³⁷ Ibid., Friday, n.d. [Oct. 1880].

¹⁰³⁸ Emmeline Esdaile to Earl Bantry, 12 Sept. 1860, IE/BL/EP/B/2401.

She still mourned the two daughters who had died and had kept a 'Spindle box bought at Carlsbad for dear little Emily just before her death in 1860 containing several of her little things and also little Brown Box... containing letters relative to Emily's death' and 'a Blue Enamel Bracelet with cameo of Lizzie in centre and Locketts all round', along with other mementos of her deceased children, which she passed on to her surviving daughters.¹⁰³⁹

Adult Children: Adult mothers

Motherhood was a long process, especially when it came to daughters who were under their parents' supervision until their marriage. Adult daughters were still a care on their mothers. Gone were the nursery maids and governesses, but the importance of social training and propriety remained. Jessica Gerard saw the mother's role in bringing out her daughter as essential in the young woman's life, and an important stage in their relationship. The mid to late teenage years were a time when 'unmarried daughters became their mother's constant companions and concern.' Jessica Gerard found that when a girl "'came out"' she became even closer to her mother', as it was her mother who acted as chaperone, vetted her acquaintances, selected her clothes and presented her at court.¹⁰⁴⁰ The success of a woman's career as a mother can be judged by the relationship which she had with their adult children. Such relationships were often quite close. This was certainly the case in the Foster family, and the daughters' social circle was occupied chiefly by their mother. Almost everything they did was in her company, whether travelling, paying calls or shopping.¹⁰⁴¹ Similarly, Mary O'Brien wrote to her mother about all her teenage problems, such as overspending her allowance, and continued to ask her advice as a wife and a mother.¹⁰⁴² Aging mothers felt that they had a right, and a responsibility, to be involved in their children's lives, even after those children had

¹⁰³⁹ Will of Countess of Bantry, 13 Oct. 1897, BL/EP/B/110.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Gerard, *Country house life*, p. 86.

¹⁰⁴¹ Ethel, Lady Inchiquin, journal entry 26 Mar. 1894, NLI/MS/14,742, for example.

¹⁰⁴² Mary O'Brien to Ellen Spring-Rice, corr. 1856-1867, NLI/MS/36,758.

become parents themselves.¹⁰⁴³ Lady Carbery tried to control her sons' lives into adulthood and could not approve of their marriages, or lifestyles, and relationships became strained.¹⁰⁴⁴ However, in general for these women, friction does not appear to have been common between them and their sons.

A concern with the welfare of the family, and the self-confidence of a woman who was proud of her own achievements in the area meant that women might also be involved in their grandchildren's lives. Such commitment demonstrated both a love of children, as well as a sense of duty. Ethel, Lady Inchiquin kept some of the loving letters sent to her eldest son and daughter from their two grandmothers.¹⁰⁴⁵ Grandmothers lived on in the memory of their grandchildren as a loving, funny and sometimes eccentric presence in their early lives.¹⁰⁴⁶ As women might have children quite young, some members of this class enjoyed the presence of their grandmother for many years.

Conclusion

As with other aspects of their lives, motherhood allowed women to mix duty with pleasure. They were proud to contribute to the success and longevity of their marital family, but also delighted in getting to know their progeny. They were not cold, distant mothers. They fretted over sick children, and mourned those who died. They enjoyed the company of their offspring, and designed children's education to suit the demands of the class. When Ethel, Lady Inchiquin's elder sister was born in 1865, a well-wisher wrote of the mother that

Henceforth (Please God) she will have a never failing source of interest in the nurture, and well doing of this dear infant.

¹⁰⁴³ Countess Bantry to Earl Bantry, corr. 1874-76, IE/BL/EP/B/2493; Ina White to Earl Bantry, 30 Oct. 1878, IE/BL/EP/B/2493.

¹⁰⁴⁴ J. Sandford, 'Epilogue' in *West Cork Journal*, pp. 139,145.

¹⁰⁴⁵ To Donough and Beryl O'Brien, 1897-1902, NLI/MS/505/3.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Carbery, *Happy world*, pp. 35,52-3; Edward O'Brien to Mary O'Brien, 17 Mar. [1867], NLI/36,755/1; Ellen Smyly to Mabel O'Brien, corr. n.d. and 1896, NLI/MS/36,785.

Tupper [minor Victorian poet] in his *Proverbial Philosophy* wrote: “A babe in a house is a well spring of pleasure” – it is quite true that children call forth so many feelings of joy, in a mother’s heart which otherwise would remain dormant, that we must rejoice when such precious gifts are bestowed.¹⁰⁴⁷

However, women were not consumed by motherhood. They did not allow their duties as a mother to curtail their other responsibilities and interests. Katherine Everett made a conscious decision, once her infant son’s life was out of danger, that she ‘must return to ordinary life and cease to focus solely’ on her baby.¹⁰⁴⁸ As women left so much of the practical care of their children to staff, mothers could devote time to their relationship with their husbands, to the running of the house and the estate, and to their interests in sport, politics, or to cultivating their family’s position within the landed class. The production of an heir was vital to the survival of the family, but even those women who did fulfil this duty could not protect the estate from the wider economic and political pressures which spelled the end of this way of life. Mary O’Brien’s son Dermot sold the estate in the 1920s; Esther Grehan’s son dictated that the estate be sold in his will, and it passed out of the family in the 1960s, and Ethel, Lady Inchiquin’s beloved Dromoland was opened as a luxury hotel just twenty-two years after her death.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Jane Stansfeld to Jonas Foster, 12 Oct. 1865. NLI/MS/45,520/7.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Everett, *Brick* p. 121.



Fig. 34: Esther Grehan, 1898. Note narrow waist and hair has grown back after it was shaved for medical reasons in autumn 1897.

Source: IE/BL/EP/G/1292.



Fig. 35: Edward Egerton Leigh around the time of his mother's death.

Source: IE/BL/EP/B/3463.

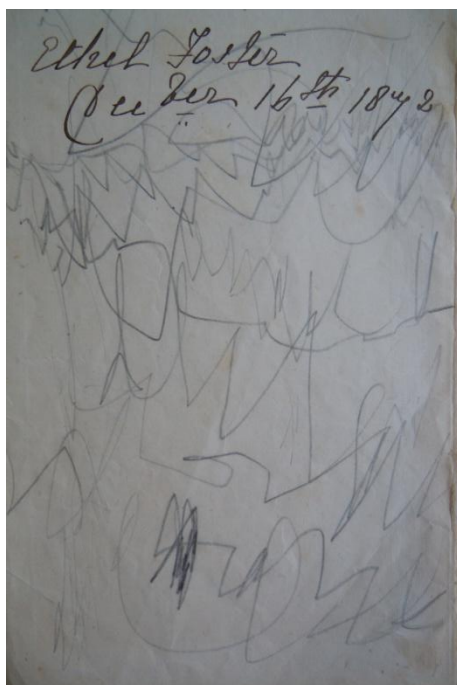


Fig. 36: Childhood scribbles of Ethel, Lady Inchiquin

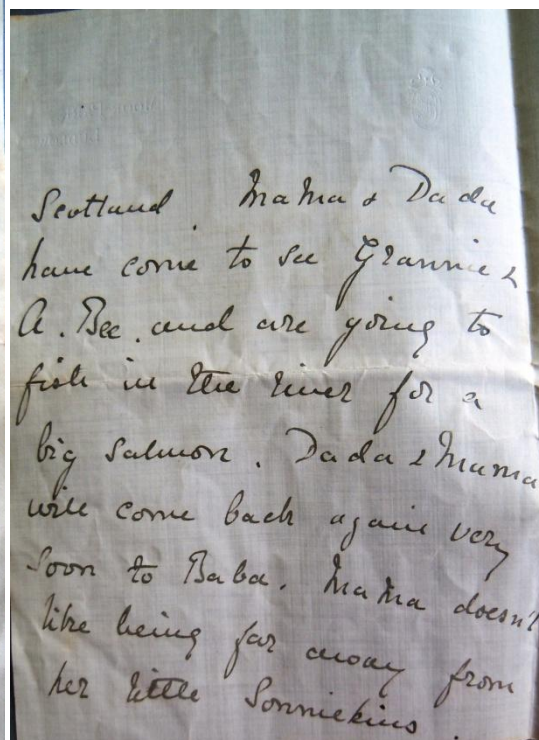
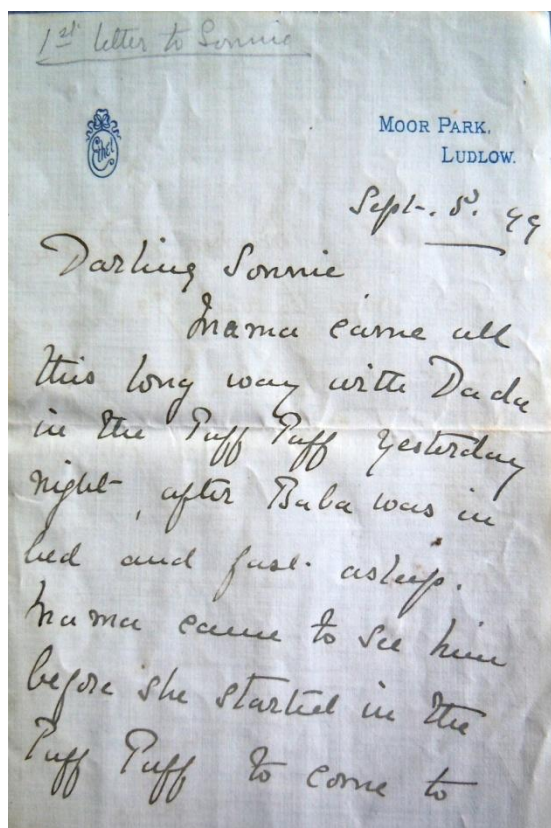


Fig. 37: First letter from Ethel, Lady Inchiquin to her son Donough, 1899, NLI/MS/



Fig. 38: Page from Ellen Lady Inchiquin's photograph album, Inchiquin Collection, NLI/MS/14,787.



Fig. 39: Ellen Lady Inchiquin's photograph album, Inchiquin Collection, NLI/MS/14,787.



Fig. 40: Ellen Lady Inchiquin's photograph album, Inchiquin Collection, NLI/MS/14,787.



Fig. 41: Ellen Lady Inchiquin's photograph album, Inchiquin Collection, NLI/MS/14,787.



Fig. 42: Ellen pictured with her children shortly before her widowhood in 1900. Ellen Lady Inchiquin's photograph album, Inchiquin Collection, NLI/MS/14,787.

Conclusion

Dearest Mai

I think you will like to have this old, old book of ‘pretty Miss Freke’s’. There is something very pathetic about it & my pretty Miss Freke will value it, I feel sure – This was Grace Freke, the grand-daughter of our Elizabeth who wrote the diary – She married the second son of the First Lord Carbery & brought Castlefreke into the Evans Family –

This is desperately sad work that I am doing & so hard. I have finished putting paper round the books & now the pictures have to be packed. Today the auctioneer’s men are pasting Lot this and Lot that on the things that are to be sold & that seems the last straw. I long to sit down & cry & cry but I dare not, as I must stick to my job. I hope it will soon be done – Goodbye little Mai – It is sad for you too, the home of your forebears being sold – Yr loving Aunt Mary

Much love to your mother

I see there was another Pretty Miss Freke who owned the book in 1768 she must have been a sister of John 6th Lord.¹⁰⁴⁹

So wrote Lady Carbery, in 1919, when Castlefreke was sold because her ne’er-do-well son was unwilling to live the life of an Irish landlord, and decided to move to ‘Happy Valley’ in Kenya. The ‘old, old book’ was *An Enquiry after Happiness* (1685)¹⁰⁵⁰, and it encouraged the seventeenth-century Miss Freke to find happiness in her Christian duty of serving others. In some ways, this book, its owner, and its history, help pinpoint the historical position of women in the Irish Big House. Lady Carbery here defined these earlier Miss Frekes (the family name of the Lords Carbery was Evans-Freke, hence Castlefreke), by their relationship to the estate; the first Miss Freke, ‘Grace’, was an heiress, and brought the property, which would become the primary seat, into the

¹⁰⁴⁹ Lady Carbery to her niece by marriage, 21 Oct. 1919, letter in the possession of Robert Boyle, Bisbrooke Hall.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Anon. By the Author of the *Practical Christianity, an enquiry after happiness*, Vol. 1 (London, 1685).

family. Her name and details were, therefore, remembered. The second Miss Freke, who signed her name in 'her book' in 1768 was forgotten, and was defined purely by her relationship to the male heir. Her name is unknown. She may have married and lived elsewhere; she may have died young, or lived out her days in Castlefreke. Though she signed her name in the book, she never really owned it, and it remained in the library in the house, stamped with the impressive Castlefreke Library label, complete with the family coat of arms. Women who married into the family and produced the heir were more likely to be remembered than their daughters, who would grow up to provide heirs for other families.

Women have repeatedly been forgotten and dismissed in family histories and genealogies. Even those written by women in favour of female suffrage, such as Edith Somerville, generally begin with the famous (in her case falsified) male ancestor who came across the Irish Sea and bought or was granted an estate.¹⁰⁵¹ Through the centuries, an occasional woman is remembered for the dowry she brought, or the inordinate number of children she gave birth to. Some special examples have been singled out in family lore such as Maire Rua O'Brien¹⁰⁵², who made an advantageous marriage during the Confederate wars, in 1651, to save the family estate from dispossession, or, as in the case of the Viscounts Doneraile, the eighteenth-century Elizabeth St Leger, who accidentally became the first female freemason, having overheard some of the society's most important secrets when her father held a meeting at Doneraile Court in 'about 1721'.¹⁰⁵³ Beyond this, the female presence was not widely remembered or commented

¹⁰⁵¹ Lewis, *Somerville*, pp. 18-19.

¹⁰⁵² M. MacNeill, *Maire Rua: Lady of Leamaneh*, (Clare, 1990).

¹⁰⁵³ Castletown, *Ego*, pp. 55-6.

on during the period under review here. Perhaps women presumed that their female ancestors had made a similar contribution to the family estate as they themselves were making, and therefore, were unremarkable, or perhaps they believed, as they seem to have done in relation to marriage, that they were infinitely more liberated than the generations who went before. It is not the purpose of this study to question whether women in the early modern period made valid and appreciated inputs into the running of their families and estates, or whether they were little more than submissive possessions, to be used by fathers and husbands for maximum economic results. It is enough to observe that, to judge from this Munster sample, the women of this class, during the period c.1860-1914, knew very little about their female ancestors as individuals. These women subscribed to the practice of primogeniture and were just as willing as their fathers, husbands and sons to put the needs of the estate above their own personal preferences.

It was for this reason that Julia O'Brien, second wife of Edward O'Brien, firmly believed that her step-son, Dermot, should inherit the family estate, while her own son, Aubrey, should find a profession. It was also for this reason that Moor Park, the childhood home of Ethel, Lady Inchiquin, was sold, and the money poured into the more indebted Irish estate of her husband, rather than the other way around. Sisters (and younger brothers) recognised and accepted that the estate would, and should, go to their eldest brother, even if he was much younger than them; they also knew that moveable property must remain in the family seat, to buttress the prestige of the patrilineal stem. Dermot O'Brien was permitted to take anything he wanted from Cahirmoyle for his Dublin house, as he was the heir, but there is no record of a similar offer being sought or

extended to his sister Nelly for her Dublin flat. But like the advice in *An Enquiry after Happiness*, women could gain pleasure and satisfaction from doing their duty by the family estate.

Notwithstanding the system which prioritised their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons on the family estate, women had validating duties which could offer them fulfilment in their lives. Husbands and wives worked together for a common goal; to sustain or augment the position of the family among the landed elite. The family needed such female functions as hosting, servant management and of course childbearing in order to do this, and women could and did assist their husbands in the running of the wider estate also. Single women, too, felt the responsibility for their family estate, even though it was rarely in their ownership and would eventually pass to nephews or cousins, rather than children of their own. Some of the most famous cases of Big Houses to survive into the twentieth-century were last cared for by a lone female member of the family. Edith Somerville sacrificed much of her literary and artistic career to her attempt at managing her family estate, as her elder brother failed in his duties, both to the estate, and in the production of heirs.¹⁰⁵⁴ Elizabeth Bowen eventually gave up the fight to save Bowen's Court, and sold it to a local farmer in 1960.¹⁰⁵⁵ Women also had something to lose from the changing social order.

Within the world of the family estate, women were imbued with some power. They were managers of what could be a large workforce, with responsibility for maintaining the Big House aura of calm and efficiency. Whether married or single, these

¹⁰⁵⁴ Lewis, *Somerville*, pp. 244, 424, 182; 197-8.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Introduction to Doneraile estate collection, p. 8.

women could take their self-confidence and sense of entitlement with them when they ventured into the outside world. Their self-assurance stemmed partly from their awareness that they held a superior social position to most men. They knew, or knew of, women like them, who, with their salons, dinner parties and balls, were at the very centre of political society, where decisions were made and alliances struck. In the existing system, any gentleman's daughter could, potentially, make a very advantageous marriage which would secure for them, and their children, an even more elevated station in society. One reason that these women did not marry men from far beneath them socially is that they valued their position in society, which was a first step towards entry into the most elite political, royal, literary and artistic circles. Members of wealthy peerage families had even greater social prestige, but all of these women occupied privileged positions in local society. Miss Mary Hungerford, Lady Carbery's garden party guest, was so hurt to be at the same party as a bank clerk, precisely because she perceived it as a threat to her position among the elite of West Cork society.

It is not surprising, then, that women like Lady Carbery were against female suffrage, and any extension of the franchise, as they felt that they, and their mothers, had done well out of the existing system, and they wanted to preserve those elite privileges for their children, of both sexes. Even those women who broke with the political ideology of the class, such as Charlotte Grace O'Brien and her niece Nelly, like many politically active women of the time, carried with them a sense of their own rectitude, which stemmed from a life of privilege and latent power over servants and estate families. And, while Charlotte Grace O'Brien was deemed to be a friend of the poor emigrant, she retained a belief in the intrinsic superiority of intelligence and manner of

her family over the men and women who worked on the estate during her childhood.¹⁰⁵⁶

Katherine Everett, who probably earned a larger income than any of the other women in the sample, firmly believed that she knew better than her superiors about the care and well-being of the patients in Mercer's 'slum hospital in Dublin' where she worked for a time, during, or just after the First World War. She did not have better training, indeed she wrote that she 'had not trained as a nurse', but because she was 'the only lady in the place'.¹⁰⁵⁷

In *Bowen's Court* and *The Last September*, Elizabeth Bowen dwelled on the passing of the landlord class as the holders of local and national power in Ireland. The First World War was a major blow to the gentry and nobility, and many of these women lost friends and relatives during the war.¹⁰⁵⁸ But, as David Cannadine has observed, the war was also an opportunity for the class to demonstrate their leadership qualities.¹⁰⁵⁹ Many of these women were imperialists, and believed in the might of Great Britain, as much as they believed in the righteousness of landed power. They contributed to the war effort using skills already developed; they entertained, they fundraised, they organised propaganda events, and were involved in nursing, and committee work. After the War, Ethel, Lady Inchiquin went on a tour of the battlefields with her daughter.¹⁰⁶⁰

During the post-war years, however, many of those women who were still alive felt abandoned, isolated, and angered by what they saw. The elderly Lord Castletown was held up and robbed by Republicans while driving near Doneraile. On another

¹⁰⁵⁶ S Gwynn, *Charlotte Grace O'Brien*, p. 11-29.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Everett, *Bricks*, pp. 144-148.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Introduction, *Inchiquin Collection*.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Cannadine, p. 81,84.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Ethel, Lady Inchiquin and Griselda O'Brien to 15th Baron Inchiquin, 26 April, 27 May, NLI/MS/45,504 and 45,506/2.

occasion, an IRA man came to Granston to take his guns and Castletown asked him ‘to take a hand at bridge’.¹⁰⁶¹ Lady Castletown was unable to deal with the troubled years of the War of Independence and the Civil War in the same philosophical manner. She wrote to Oliver Wendell Holmes in an undated letter from the period:

[V]ile murders being committed all over this wretched little country with apparent impunity & everybody more or less up in arms about everything –

I rather wish we could go & settle for the rest of our days in California & never set foot in Ireland again – life has become so utterly futile and hopeless & generally disgusting here....Fancy this being Ascot week! & Oh the merry days that we used to have there 100 years ago when all the world was young...I think the longer one lives the less one likes living –¹⁰⁶²

They did not leave, but remained in Doneraile. Macroom Castle, the ancestral property of Lady Ardilaun, was burned down during the Civil War, and her bitterness was evident in her will.¹⁰⁶³ Her cousin, Katherine Everett, who viewed the smouldering ruin, believed that ‘it was better burnt for it to be cleansed of all the horror it had seen,’ having been commandeered by the Black and Tans and later the IRA.¹⁰⁶⁴ Everett believed that she and Lady Ardilaun ‘were temperamentally alike and both of us were disinclined to submit to any terrorist tactics.’¹⁰⁶⁵ In her memoir she presented them both as fearless in the face of life threatening situations. Ardilaun continued to walk alone in her garden despite being told she was a potential kidnap victim, and told her friends that if she was kidnapped she would die, and they should put ‘died of rage’ on her tombstone.¹⁰⁶⁶ Everett had more direct experience of the war, and was held up by nine

¹⁰⁶¹ Lord Castletown, *Ego*, p. 230-1.

¹⁰⁶² Lady Castletown to Wendell Holmes, June 14 n.d., Holmes Papers, quoted in White, *Wendell Holmes*, p. 247.

¹⁰⁶³ Will of Lady Ardilaun, 1925, BL/EP/B/112.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Everett, *Bricks*, pp. 177-8.

¹⁰⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

¹⁰⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

armed men one night while cycling alone, she also claimed responsibility for having a sniper killed who had been using a hole in her garden wall to shoot British soldiers.¹⁰⁶⁷ Throughout the period under review, and in the decades after, these women held firmly to the world view that they, and their families, were the rightful holders of power, in view of their ancestral grip on wealth and government.

The book of 'Pretty Miss Freke' survived the fire in 1910, which had almost destroyed the house, with only minor smoke damage to the covers. It was only in 1919, when the house was to be sold, and the establishment scattered, that the book was moved off its shelf in the library, where it had stood for over two centuries. It went to another Miss Freke, who lived in a country house in Rutland the daughter of Lady Carbery's brother-in-law.¹⁰⁶⁸ Through marriage, and the matrilineal line, these families had numerous links across the Irish Sea. Today, the women discussed in this thesis are treated by historians, just as they had treated their own female ancestors: they are largely forgotten providers of marriage portions and bearers of children. Lady Ardilaun, for example, has been mentioned in works only as the requisite noble bride to smooth her brewer husband's path to the peerage.¹⁰⁶⁹ Some historians have broken this pattern and succeeded in demonstrating that research into the women in such families results not only in an improved understanding of the female position, but also of their family, and their class. A more detailed and larger study of female marriage patterns, for example, could demonstrate the nature of this class's horizontal family ties with the wider British elite, but also their vertical social ties, through daughters marrying clergymen and

¹⁰⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 173-174.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Private papers, Bisbrooke Hall.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Thompson, *Landed society*, p. 293; Bielenberg, 'Elite formation', p. 135.

professionals, and so on. Such a study would definitively demonstrate the relationship which the landed elite had with other classes in society – something which cannot be known from samples which prioritise the male heirs of estates. This study has sought to rebalance the nature of Big House history in Ireland, which has overemphasised the male role and undervalued the contribution of women to landed families. Of course women never gained legal equality with their husbands and brothers, and they generally deferred to the men in their family – that is not disputed – but women did carry out appreciated roles and duties. In acknowledging this contribution, and the value placed on it at the time, a re-gendering of the Big House in Ireland can be achieved. These were not purely masculine spaces where women were pawns to be bought and sold in matrimony; they were places where women willingly put the good of the family above individualistic aims, just as men frequently did, and women repeatedly found satisfaction in the pursuit of the common aim of promoting the power and prestige of their home, and their family.

Appendix 1: Biographical Information

Ardilaun née White, Lady Olivia Charlotte (Olive) (1850-1925)

Olive was the second daughter of the 3rd Earl of Bantry to survive to adulthood. She married Arthur Guinness, 1st Lord Ardilaun, heir to the famous brewing company in 1871. It was a happy marriage but they had no children, and the title became extinct. The couple owned Ashford Castle, Co. Mayo, St. Anne's, Co. Dublin, and town houses in Dublin and London, as well as Macroom Castle (Burned during the Civil War), which had been inherited by Olive.

Sources: Bantry Estate Papers, Boole Library, UCC, 'Ardilaun', 'Bantry', *Burke's Peerage*.

Bandon née Evans-Freke, Dorothea 'Doty' (d.1942)

Doty Bandon was the only daughter of the deaf and dumb 7th Baron Carbery. She married the Earl of Bandon but died without issue. Lady Castletown bequeathed her most personal papers to Doty. Following the burning of the family seat of Castle Bernard and her widowhood in 1924, she moved permanently to Laxton Hall, Northamptonshire.

Sources: Carbery papers, Bisbrooke Hall, Rutland. Bence-Jones, *Twilight*.

Bantry, 3rd Earl William Henry Hare Hedges White (1801-1884)

William inherited the Earldom of Bantry when his brother died childless in 1868. He had married Jane Herbert of the Muckcross estate in Co. Kerry in 1845. The family possessed two country houses in Munster; Bantry House and Macroom Castle, as well as a property in Lowndes Square, Belgravia. The couple had six children, though one died at the age of twelve.

Sources: 'Bantry' *Burkes Peerage*, Bantry Collection, IE/BL/EP/B/

Carbery née Toulmain, Mary (1867-1949)

Mary grew up in Hertfordshire. She described her childhood as a very happy one in her memoir *Happy World*, which she began as a twelve year old, but reworked as an adult. Mary was the second daughter of Harry Toulmin and Emma née Wroughton who had twelve children together. Mary married Algernon Evans-Freke, 9th Baron Carbery in 1890. He had been in school with her brother. Mary and 'Algie' had two sons before he died as a result of

tuberculosis in 1898. She lived at Castlefreke with her children until she married Kit Sandford, a celebrated Cork doctor, in 1902, and had a further two sons. The family shared their time between Castlefreke and Sandford's Cork City home and nearby estate. Mary was the most prolific published author in the sample, and published fiction, biographical, and auto-biographical works. Castlefreke was accidentally burned down in 1910, but Mary had it rebuilt. Her son, 10th Lord Carbery, sold it in 1919. She spent the last years of her second widowhood in a small house, which she had built on her son Christopher Sandford's estate.

Source: 'Carbery' *Burke's Peerage*, 'Toulmin', *Burke's Landed Gentry* (1898), vol.1. 'Introduction' and 'Epilogue', J. Sandford (ed.), *Happy World*.

Castletown (Fitzpatrick) née St Leger, Clare (c. 1853-1927)

Clare was the only surviving offspring of Hayes, 4th Viscount Doneraile, and inherited his estate. She married 'Barnie' Bernard Edward Barnaby Fitzpatrick, who would become the 2nd Baron Castletown in 1874. The couple honeymooned in Scandinavia, and, afterwards, shared their time between their seats at Doneraile, Co. Cork and Granston, Co. Laois, as well as their London home. The couple had no surviving children. Lord Castletown was given the prestigious honour of becoming a Knight of the Order of St Patrick in 1908. Lady Castletown was involved in philanthropy in her locality. She had affairs with at least two men, the American judge Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Percy la Touche, a member of the Irish landed class, but did not leave her husband. She died, unusually for a woman, in her childhood home, after suffering a series of strokes. She was survived by her husband, who lived until 1937.

Sources: Doneraile Estate Papers, Castletown Estate Papers, NLI, Lady Castletown Papers, Bisbrooke, 'Castletown', 'Doneraile', *Burke's Peerage*.

Chichester, Amy

Amy, (dates unknown) younger sister of Esther Grehan became a nun, and lived in Stanbrook Abbey in Yorkshire. Despite living in a convent, she corresponded with her sister. Esther's last surviving letter was written to Amy.

Source: Grehan estate papers.

Chichester, Christine:

Christine, (dates unknown) sister of Esther Grehan née Chichester, remained unmarried. She often joined the Grehan family on holidays and at their home in Clonmeen. She was widely travelled, but does not appear to have had her own establishment.

Source: Grehan estate papers.

Clifford née Chichester, May (before 1860-1881)

May was an elder sister of Esther Grehan. She married Charlie Clifford in early 1881, but died in Sydney in December of the same year, having given birth to a boy.

Source: Grehan estate papers.

Colthurst née Morris, Edith, (d.1930)

Edith, the daughter of Capt. Jonas Morris, 1st Royal Dragoons, with an address at Dunkathel, Co. Cork, married the thirty-one-year-old Sir George St. John Colthurst in 1881, and gave birth to three children, but her only daughter, also Edith, died young (1884-1892). The Colthursts lived at Blarney.

Source: 'Colthurst' *Burke's peerage*.

Viscountess Doneraile (St Leger) née Lenox Conygham, Mary Anne (d.1907)

Mary Anne was married to Hayes, 4th Viscount Doneraile in 1851. She gave birth to three children. Unusually, Hayes and Mary Anne named the infant who died in their return for *Burke's Peerage*. Their son, Hayes, was born and died in 1852, one year after their marriage. Two daughters followed, but May died young in 1867, and Ursula Clare, later Lady Castletown, was the only one to survive to adulthood. The family lived at Doneraile Court and in their London House. In widowhood, the Viscountess took up residence in France, where she died in 1907.

Source: Doneraile Estate Papers, 'Doneraile', *Burke's Peerage*.

Everett née Herbert, Katherine (1873-1951)

Katherine grew up on her father's estate in Killarney. She was married in 1901. Her husband was her maternal first cousin and an artist, to whom she had become close while staying with her aunt, his mother. Katherine and her husband, the confusingly named, Herbert Everett, both attended the Slade School. Herbert was a prolific seascape painter but had no financial incentive to sell his works as he had an unearned inherited income. He bequeathed his entire body of work to the British National Maritime Museum. Katherine did not pursue a career in art, but had a varied life and tried her hand at gardening, nursing, architecture, building, and writing. The couple had two sons, but divorced during the First World War. She was the cousin and goddaughter of Olive Lady Ardilaun.

Source: Everett, *Bricks and Flowers*; *Burke Landed Gentry*.

Ferrers née White, Countess Ina (1852-1907)

Ina grew up between her family's homes in Bantry and Macroom. She was the last of her sisters to marry. She fell out with her brother, the heir, when he married a Catholic. Ina eventually married Seawallis Shirley, 10th Earl Ferrers (b.1847) in 1885. Her marital home was Staunton Harold, a magnificent Georgian mansion in Ashby-De-La-Zouch, Leicestershire. It appears to have been an unhappy marriage and the pair had no children. In later years she was reported, by her cousin Katherine Everett, to suffer from bronchitis and asthma, which put a strain on her heart.

Source: Bantry Estate Papers, Boole Library, UCC, *Burke's Peerage*, Everett, *Brick and Flowers*.

Grehan, George:

Eldest son of Stephen and Esther Grehan, George (1893) died in infancy.

Source: Grehan Family Papers and descriptive list. IE/BL/EP/G.

Grehan née Chichester, Esther (1860-1900)

Esther, a Catholic, grew up at Runnamoat, Co. Roscommon. This estate was brought to the Chichester family by Esther's mother, Mary Balfe (d.1871), an heiress, who married her father Col. Charles Raleigh Chichester, in 1852. He was a member of the Catholic English landed elite, and served in the Crimean War. Her eldest brother inherited both Runnamoat and Burton Constable in Yorkshire from a paternal relative. Runnamoat was burned in the 1920s. Esther attended Roehampton Convent for at least a few months in 1875. In 1883 she married Stephen Grehan. They lived in Clonmeen House, outside the village of Banteer in North Cork. Together they had six children: May, Magda, Kathleen, Aileen, George (died in infancy) and Stevie. Esther Grehan suffered from asthma and other chest ailments for much of her life. She also endured severe gynaecological problems after the birth of her last child. She died while on a cruise, taken for the benefit of her health, and is buried in Sri Lanka.

Sources: Grehan Family Papers and descriptive list. IE/BL/EP/G and 'Estate: Chichester', Landed Estates Database. <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/estate-show.jsp?id=1547> accessed on 20 Aug. 2013, 'Sir Charles and Lady Mary Barbara Chichester', University of Hull, <http://www.hull.ac.uk/arc/collection/landedfamilyandestatepapers/chichester.html>

Grehan, Aileen (b.1890)

Aileen was the youngest daughter in the Grehan family. She married a distant relative, and a member of the Indian army Major Denis George Jocelyn (Joss) Ryan in 1922, the couple lived in India for a time, but she was widowed in 1927. Her daughter died at the age of 8, in 1933, and her son was killed at the age of 21, during the Second World War.

Source: Grehan Family Papers and descriptive list. IE/BL/EP/G.

Grehan, Kathleen

See Ryan.

Grehan, Magda (b.1885)

Magda, the second daughter of Esther and Stephen Grehan, attended Roehampton with her sisters. She married George Whyte in 1916. He survived service in the First World War, but died in 1919.

Source: Grehan Family Papers and descriptive list. IE/BL/EP/G.

Grehan, Mary (May) (b.1884)

May, was the eldest child of Stephen and Esther Grehan. She attended a convent in Amiens for a time. She was sixteen when her mother died, and in 1902 was the only sister living at home. May acted as a companion to her widowed father and was the last of her sisters to marry. She wed Cyril Irwin in 1923, aged 39, to the great surprise of her father.

Source: Grehan Family Papers and descriptive list. IE/BL/EP/G.

Grehan, Stephen (1859-1937)

Stephen's family originated as Catholic wine merchants in Dublin. He was the first of his family to be raised on the Co. Cork estate, as member of the landed elite. He was involved in the Duhallow Hunt and was a JP for the area. He was also on the board of the 'Cork Lunatics Asylum' and was a firm Unionist. His wife, Esther Chichester, was a member of the Catholic landed elite. The Grehans built a new house at Clonmeen, where they lived with their five surviving children. Stephen lost his wife after seventeen years of marriage and survived her, without remarrying, for a further thirty-seven years. He brought his two eldest daughters to Jerusalem in 1904. He died at the age of 78.

Source: Grehan Family Papers and descriptive list. IE/BL/EP/G.

Grehan, Major Stephen (Stevie) (1895-1972)

Stevie was Esther Grehan's youngest child, and was only five when she died. He joined the British army immediately after school and served during the First World War. He married Cecily Gainsford St. Lawrence, who was a member of a prominent English family, in 1925, and lived at Clonmeen until his death. The estate was sold soon after.

Source: Grehan Family Papers and descriptive list. IE/BL/EP/G.

Herbert née Balfour, Mary (1817-93)

Mary was born in Scotland, her mother was a daughter of eighth Earl of Lauderdale and her father was the second son of a Laird who had made his fortune in the east, where he had first worked as a clerk in the East India Company before securing an Admiralty contract. Her nephew, Arthur Balfour, enjoyed fame as a successful politician. In 1837 she married the twenty-two -year-old Henry Arthur Herbert of Muckross House, whom she had met while travelling in Rome with her family. Herbert was an M.P. and was appointed a member of Privy Council in 1856 and became Chief Secretary of Ireland in 1857, though he was removed in the following year. The couple had four children. Throughout her life, Mary was an avid watercolourist, and enjoyed painting representations of the landscape around her marital home. When her husband died in 1866, the forty-nine-year-old Mary, and her two unmarried daughters, moved to live in Grosvenor Square, London. Her son could not afford to keep up Muckross House and it was sold in 1899.

Nell Spillane, unpublished account of the life of Mary Herbert, Muckross Research Library (1987), Sinead McCooile, 'A nineteenth century Lady, Mary Herbert (1817-1893)'. *Mary Herbert of Muckross House, 1817-1893*, catalogue of exhibition 1999, Muckross.

O'Brien née White, Lady Ellen Inchiquin

Ellen, unconnected with the Whites of Bantry House, was the daughter of the 2nd Baron Annaly, Luttrellstown, Dublin. She became the second wife of Edward Donough O'Brien, 14th Baron Inchiquin in 1874. The couple had ten children, and her husband already had a family of four from his first marriage. They lived at Dromoland Castle, Co. Clare. When her husband died in 1900, Ellen moved to London with her unmarried children.

Sources: Inchiquin Estate Papers, NLI. 'Inchiquin', 'Annaly' *Burke's Peerage*.

Inchiquin née Holmes à Court, Lady Emily (1842-1868)

Emily was the daughter of the 2nd Baron Heytesbury of Heytesbury House, Wiltshire. She became the first wife of Edward William, 14th Baron Inchiquin in August 1862. He was twenty-three, and she twenty at the time. She preserved her wedding wreath as a memento of the day. Their happiness was short-lived however, as Emily died eleven days after the birth of her fourth child, not six years after their wedding day. Six years later Edward married Ethel, Lady Inchiquin, and fathered ten more children.

Sources: Inchiquin Estate Papers, NLI. 'Inchiquin', 'Heytesbury', *Burke's Peerage*.

Kenney Herbert née White, Jane (1857-1946)

Jane was the youngest child of the Earl and Countess of Bantry, and the least represented in the family estate papers. She married Edward Kenney Herbert, an inspector of schools in 1876. They had two children, a son in 1877 and a daughter in 1885.

Sources: Bantry Estate Papers, Boole Library, UCC, 'Bantry' *Burke's Peerage*.

Leigh née White, Lady Elizabeth (1847-1880)

Elizabeth was the eldest of her father, the 3rd Earl of Bantry's children, and his favourite. She was a sickly child, and was diagnosed with rheumatism from at least the age of thirteen. Ill-health followed her throughout her life. She married Egerton Leigh, (1843-1928) in 1874, the heir to High Leigh, and other family properties, in Cheshire. While waiting out his inheritance they lived at Kermincham, Cheshire. They had two children; Margaret (1875-1955) and Edward (1876-1920), who would inherit the Bantry estate. Having two children so close together further weakened her health. She died of a self-inflicted overdose of chloral, though the inquest findings stated that it was accidental.

Source: Bantry Estate Papers, Boole Library, UCC, 'Bantry', *Burke's Peerage*.

O'Brien née Marshall, Julia

Julia became the second wife of Edward O'Brien of Cahirmoyle, and the step-mother of his three children in 1880. The couple had four more children and shared their time between Cahirmoyle, London, and continental Europe.

Source: O'Brien of Cahirmoyle Papers, NLI.

O'Brien née Spring-Rice, Mary (c.1841–1868)

Mary O'Brien was the granddaughter of the first Baron Monteagle, who earned a good reputation as concerned landlord during the famine. Her father, the heir, was a deputy chair of the Board of Customs. He predeceased his father by a few months in 1869. The title passed to her younger brother, Thomas, who was co-founder of the Irish co-operative movement with Horace Plunkett. Her mother was Ellen Mary Frere, the daughter of a Master of Downing College. The Spring-Rice family seat was Mount Trenchard in Foynes, Co. Limerick. Mary married Edward O'Brien in September 1863, when she was not more than twenty-two. Her marital home was Cahirmoyle in Ardagh, also in Co. Limerick. They had three children in the space of three years, who all survived to adulthood; Ellen Lucy (Nelly), Dermod and Lucy Mary. Mary O'Brien died from Tuberculosis in 1868, in Menton on the French Riviera.

Sources: 'Monteagle', 'Inchiquin', *Burke's Peerage*, O'Brien of Cahirmoyle Papers, NLI.

O'Brien, Charlotte Grace (1845-1909)

Charlotte Grace O'Brien was the daughter of William Smith O'Brien, a landlord who was sentenced to death, transported and later fully pardoned for his part in the failed 1848 rebellion. She inherited some of his desire for change, and worked tirelessly for much of her adult life to ease the suffering of Irish emigrants, especially lone females. She grew up on the family estate of Cahirmoyle, near Ardagh, Co. Limerick, and this was to form much of the subject matter for her published writings. Charlotte acted as a companion to her father in his later years. When he died, she moved to live with her elder brother William, and his new wife Mary. Charlotte is the subject of a biographical essay by Anne O'Connell in Cullen, and Luddy (eds), *Women power and consciousness in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 1996), which detailed some of her public career. Shortly after her death, her nephew, Stephen Gwynn, produced a memoir and a collection of her writings.

Sources: O'Brien of Cahirmoyle Papers, NLI; S. Gwynn, *Charlotte Grace O'Brien; selections from her writings and correspondence with a memoir by Stephen Gwynn* (1909, Charleston, S.C., 2012).

O'Brien, Dermod (1865-1945)

Dermod O'Brien was the only son of Edward and Mary O'Brien, and inherited the Cahirmoyle estate. His mother died when he was three. He wanted to be a professional artist and trained in Italy, Antwerp and Paris, and enrolled in the Slade School in 1894 (Snoddy). He moved to Dublin in 1901, and by 1910 he was president of the Royal Hibernian Academy, and held the post until his death. Dermod had a step-mother, Julia, two sisters, and four step-siblings. He married Mabel née Smyly in 1902. The couple shared their time between the family estate of Cahirmoyle and their Dublin house at 42 Mountjoy Square.

Sources: O'Brien of Cahirmoyle Papers, NLI. Snoddy, *Dictionary of Irish Artists*.

O'Brien Ellen Lucy (Nelly) (1864-1925)

Nelly was the eldest child of Edward and Mary O'Brien, and was born just ten months after their wedding. Her mother died when she was four, and she had four step-siblings from her father's second marriage. She had a good relationship with her step-mother, Julia. Nelly was an artist and Gaelic activist. She exhibited 72 works at the Royal Hibernian Academy from 1896 to 1922. She attended the South Kensington School of Art for some time. She was deeply interested in the Irish language and she was a founding member of the Gaelic League, and an Irish College at Carrigaholt, Co. Clare. Nelly never married and had numerous addresses in rented accommodation during her life. She had a wide circle of friends and was devoted to her family

Source: O'Brien of Cahirmoyle Papers, NLI. Snoddy, *Dictionary of Irish Artists*.

O'Brien Edward (1837-

Edward was the eldest son and heir of William Smith O'Brien, who led a doomed rebellion in 1848. Smith O'Brien was exiled, and his estate of Cahirmoyle was transferred in trust to his wife and family. Edward inherited the estate when he came of age. He married his first wife Mary Spring-Rice in 1863. They had three children, but she died in 1868. He then lived with his children and his younger sister, Charlotte-Grace O'Brien, who took care of his offspring. He married, secondly, Julia Mary Marshall, and had a further four children. The family shared their time between London and Cahirmoyle.

Sources: *Burke's Peerage*, Cahirmoyle Estate Papers, NLI.

O'Brien, née Smyly, Mabel (1869-1942)

Mabel was the daughter of an eminent Dublin doctor, Sir Philip Crampton Smyly, and lived before her marriage in the family home in Merrion Square. Her grandmother was the leading philanthropist Ellen Smyly who founded proselytising schools in Dublin. Mabel married her friend's brother, Dermot O'Brien, in 1902. The pair had a happy marriage, and five children. They shared their time between Dublin and the family estate of Cahirmoyle which was sold 1919. Mabel was a great organiser and founded Ardagh Cheese, among many other interests and achievements.

Sources: O'Brien of Cahirmoyle Papers, NLI. Census.1901,
http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Dublin/Trinity/Merrion_Square_North/1311539/
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Ryan , née Grehan Kathleen (1888-1975)

Kathleen, was Esther and Stephen Grehan's third child. She was athletic and enjoyed hunting and hockey. She gained her formal education at Roehampton Convent on the outskirts of London. She married her distant cousin, Richard (Dick) Ryan (also Catholic), in 1910. Dick inherited the family estate from his father in 1927, and the couple had two children.

Sources: Grehan and Ryan Family Papers and descriptive lists. IE/BL/EP/G, IE/BL/EP/R.

Spring-Rice née Frere, Ellen Mary (b. c.1815-1821, d.1869)

Ellen Mary Spring-Rice was the mother of Mary O'Brien. She was the daughter of William Frere, a sergeant-at-law and Master of Downing College, Cambridge. He became Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University in 1819. The family lived between Downing College and the family estate in Cambridgeshire. She married Stephen Edmond Spring-Rice, heir to the Mounteagle estate in 1839. The couple had ten children; eight girls and two boys. The widowed Ellen died in Cannes.

Sources: O'Brien of Cahirmoyle Papers, NLI, 'Mounteagle', *Burkes Peerage* and 'William Frere', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.library.ucc.ie/view/article/10176>

White née Herbert, Jane, Countess of Bantry (1823-1898)

The 3rd Countess of Bantry was originally from Muckross House, Killarney. She never knew her father, as he died prematurely before she was born. Jane married William Henry Hare Hedges White in 1845, and lived in Macroom Castle. In 1868 William's brother Richard, the 2nd Earl of Bantry died without issue and William was raised to the peerage. Jane had six children; five girls and one boy, but outlived three of them. She also undertook the care of her grandchildren, Margaret and Edward Leigh. The Earl and Countess of Bantry divided their time between Bantry House and Macroom Castle, and their house in Lowndes Square, Belgravia.

Sources; Bantry House Papers and Descriptive List, IE/BL/EP/B.

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